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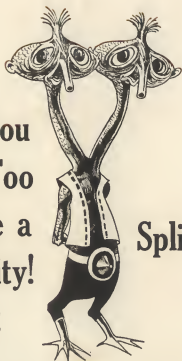
**WAS SHE A WOMAN—
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Can be a
Personality!**

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SCIENCE FICTION

October, 1958

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Short Novel:

THE SILENT INVADERS.....Calvin M. Knox 6

Novelet:

FAIRYLAND PLANET.....John Silletto 78

Stories:

WORDS AND MUSIC.....A. Bertram Chandler 41

BETWEEN THE DARK AND THE DAYLIGHT
.....David C. Hodgkins 52

THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T SIGN UP
.....Thomas E. Purdom 68

INFILTRATION.....Algis Budrys 114

Departments:

BY THE EDITOR..... 4

INFINITY'S CHOICE.....Robert Silverberg 109

FEEDBACK.....The Readers 124

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By the editor



SCIENCE THRU SCIENCE FICTION

FAIRLY frequently, a crackpot wanders into the science fiction field and attempts to use the professional and/or amateur magazines to spread propaganda for his screwball ideas. That being so, a lot of experienced fans and readers consider every announcement of a scientific idea, new club or society, or the like, with jaded and suspicious eyes. The wary attitude is a wise one—but some very worthwhile projects are initiated through the magazines, too, and it would be a shame if any of them foundered because of wariness on the readers' part.

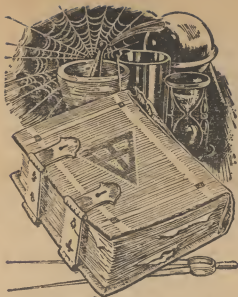
The announcement about "Science thru Science Fiction" that you'll find elsewhere in this issue definitely does not fall into the crackpot category. The people behind it are mature, intelligent, and responsible; one of them is Fritz Leiber, whom you all know, and the others are Earl Kemp and F. L. Light, for whom I am quite willing to vouch.

In a letter accompanying the announcement, the com-

mittee says, "Our aim is sf clubs in every elementary school, high school and college, with one major aim of the club for each reader to get another person interested in reading in this field. We want to promote the reading of all science fiction magazines and books. To teachers and students interested in starting clubs, we will furnish suggestions on programming interesting meetings, enlarging and diversifying the science fiction interests of members, and getting new readers."

Naturally, new readers are essential to the continued life of commercial science fiction magazines and books; without them, no publisher could continue to operate. But my reasons for approving of the "Science thru Science Fiction" program are not entirely mercenary. I happen to agree that science fiction—at its best—can serve a purpose beyond mere entertainment. And on this subject, let me drag out the quotation marks once more to bring in a news item from the *Chicago Daily* (Continued on page 113)

Secrets
entrusted
to a
few



The Unpublished Facts of Life

THERE are some things that cannot be generally told — *things you ought to know*. Great truths are dangerous to some—but factors for *personal power and accomplishment* in the hands of those who understand them. Behind the tales of the miracles and mysteries of the ancients, lie centuries of their secret probing into nature's laws—their amazing discoveries of the *hidden processes of man's mind*, and the *mastery of life's problems*. Once shrouded in mystery to avoid their destruction by mass fear and ignorance, these facts remain a useful heritage for the thousands of men and women who privately use them in their homes today.

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SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.

THE SILENT INVADERS

By CALVIN M. KNOX

Even a perfect disguise creates problems for its wearer. How, for one thing, can he be sure anyone else is what he seems?

Illustrated by ED EMSH

CHAPTER I

THE STARSHIP *Lucky Lady* thundered out of overdrive half a million miles from Earth, and began the long steady ion-drive glide at Earthnorm grav toward the orbiting depot. In his second-class cabin aboard the starship, the man whose papers said he was Major Abner Harris of the Interstellar

Development Corps stared at his face in the mirror. He wanted to make sure for the hundredth time that there was no sign of where his tendrils once had been.

He smiled; and the even-featured, undistinguished face they had put on him drew back, lips rising in the corners, cheeks tightening, neat white teeth momentarily on display. Major Harris



scowled, and the face darkened.

It behaved well. The synthetic white skin acted as if it were his own. The surgeons back on Darruu had done a superb job on him.

They had removed the fleshy four-inch-long tendrils that sprouted at a Darruui's temples; they had covered his deep golden skin with an overlay of convincingly Terran white, and grafted it so skilfully that by now it had become his real skin. Contact lenses turned his eyes from red to blue-gray. Hormone treatments had caused hair to sprout on head and body, where none had been before. They had not meddled with his internal plumbing, and there he remained alien, with the Darruui digestive organ where a Terran had so many incredible feet of intestine, with the double heart and the sturdy liver just back of his three lungs.

Inside he was alien. Behind the walls of his skull, he was Aar Khiilom of the city of Helasz—a Darruui of the highest caste, a Servant of the Spirit. Externally, though, he was Major Abner Harris. He knew Major Harris' biography in great detail.

Born 2520, in Cincinnati, Ohio, United States, Earth. Age now, 42—with a good

hundred years of his lifespan left. Attended Western Reserve University, studying galactography; graduated '43. Entered the Interstellar Re-development Corps '46, commissioned '50, now a Major. Missions to Altair VII, Sirius IX, Procyon II, Alpheratz IV. Unmarried. Parents killed in highway jet-crash in '44; no known relatives. Height five feet ten, weight 220, color fair, retinal index point-oh-three.

Major Harris was visiting Earth on vacation. He was to spend eight months on Earth before reassignment to his next planetary post.

Eight months, thought the one who called himself Major Harris, would be ample time for Major Harris to lose himself in the billions of Earth and carry out the purposes for which he had been sent here.

THE *Lucky Lady* was on the last lap of her journey. Harris had boarded her on Alpheratz IV, after having been shipped there from Darruu by private warpship. For the past three weeks, while the giant vessel had slipped through the sleek gray tunnel in the continuum that was its over-drive channel, Harris had been learning to walk at Earthnorm gravity.

Darruu was a large world—radius 11,000 miles—and

though its density was not as great as Earth's, still the gravitational attraction was half again as intense. Darruu's gravity was 1.5 Earthnorm. Or, as Harris had thought of it in the days when his mind centered not on Earth but on Darruu, Earth's gravity was .67 Darruunorm. Either way, it meant that his muscles would be functioning in a field two-thirds as strong as the one they had developed in. He could use the excuse that he had spent most of his time on heavy planets, and that would explain away some of his awkwardness.

But not all. A native Earth-er, no matter how long he stays on a heavy world, still knows how to cope with Earthnorm gravity. Harris had to learn that. He *did* learn it, painstakingly, during the three weeks of overdrive travel toward the system of Sol.

Now the journey was almost complete. All that remained was the transfer from the starship to an Earth shuttle, and then he could begin life as an Earthman.

Earth hung outside the main viewport twenty feet from Harris's cabin. He stared at it. A great green ball of a world, with two huge continents here, another land-mass there, a giant moon moving in slow procession around it, keeping one pockmarked face eternally staring inward,

the other glaring at outer space like a single beady bright eye.

The sight made Harris homesick.

Darruu was nothing like this. Darruu, from space, seemed to be a giant red fruit, covered over by the crimson mist that was the upper layer of its atmosphere. Beneath that could be discerned the great blue seas and the two hemisphere-large continents of Darraa and Darroo.

And the moons, Harris thought nostalgically. Seven glistening blank faces like coins in the sky, each at its own angle to the ecliptic, each taking its place in the sky nightly like a gem moved by clockwork. And the Mating of the Moons, when the seven came together once a year in a fiercely radiant diadem that filled half the sky—

Angrily he cut the train of thought.

You're an Earthman. Forget Darruu.

A voice on a speaker overhead said, "Please return to your cabins, ladies and gentlemen. In eleven minutes we will come to a rest at the main spaceborne depot. Passengers intending to transfer here please notify their area steward."

Harris returned to his cabin while the voice repeated the statement in other languages. Earth still spoke more

than a dozen major tongues, which surprised him; Darruu had reached linguistic homogeneity three thousand years or more ago.

Minutes ticked by; at last came the word that the *Lucky Lady* had ended its ion-drive cruise and was tethered to the orbital satellite. Harris left his cabin for the last time and headed downramp to the designated room on D Deck where outgoing passengers were assembling.

"Your baggage will be shipped across. You don't have to worry about that."

Harris nodded. His baggage was important.

More than three hundred of the passengers were leaving ship here. Harris was herded along with the others through an airlock. Several dozen ungainly little ferries hovered just outside, linked to the huge starliner by connecting tubes. Harris entered a swaying tube, crossed over, and found a seat in the ferry. Minutes later, he was repeating the process in the other direction, as the ferry unloaded its passengers into the main airlock of Orbiting Station Number One.

Another voice boomed, "*Lucky Lady* passengers continuing on to Earth report to Routing Channel Four. *Lucky Lady* passengers continuing on to Earth report to Routing

Channel Four. Passengers transshipping to other starlines should go to the nearest routing desk at once."

At Routing Channel Four, Harris was called upon to produce his papers. He handed over the little fabrikoid portfolio; a spaceport official rifled sleepily through it and handed it back without a word.

As he boarded the Earth-Orbiter shuttle, an attractive stewardess handed him a multigraphed sheet of paper which contained information of a sort a tourist was likely to want to know. Harris scanned it quickly.

"The Orbiting Station is located eighty thousand miles from Earth. It is locked in a twenty-four hour orbit that keeps it hovering approximately above Quito, Ecuador, South America. During a year the Orbiting Station serves an average of 8,500,000 travelers—"

He finished reading the sheet and put it down. He eyed his fellow passengers in the Earthbound shuttle. There were about fifty of them.

For all he knew, five were disguised Darrui like himself. Or they might be enemies—Medlins—likewise in disguise. Perhaps he was surrounded by agents of Earth's own intelligence corps who

had already penetrated his disguise.

Trouble lay on every hand. Inwardly Major Harris felt calm, though there was the faint twinge of homesickness for Darruu that he knew he would never be able entirely to erase.

The shuttle banked into a steep deceleration curve. Artificial grav aboard the ship remained constant, of course. Earth drew near.

Landing came.

THE SHUTTLE hung over the skin of the landing-field for thirty seconds, then dropped; a gantry crane shuffled out to support the ship, and buttress-legs sprang from the sides of the hull. A steward's voice said, "Passengers will please assemble at the airlock in single file."

They assembled. A green omnibus waited outside on the field, and the fifty of them filed in. Harris found a seat by the window and stared out across the broad field. A yellow sun was in the blue sky. The air was cold; he shivered involuntarily and drew his cloak around him for warmth.

"Cold?" asked the man who shared his seat with him.

"A bit."

"That's odd. Nice balmy spring day like this, you'd think everybody would be enjoying the weather."

Harris grinned. "I've been or some pretty hot worlds the last ten years. Anything under ninety degrees and I start shivering, now."

The other chuckled and said, "Must be near eighty in the shade today."

"I'll be accustomed to it again before long," Harris said. "Once an Earthman, always an Earthman."

He made a mental note to carry out a trifling adjustment on his body thermostat. His skin was lined with subminiaturized heating and refrigerating units—just one of the useful modifications the surgeons had given him.

Darruu's mean temperature was 120 degrees, on the scale used by the Earthers. When it dropped to 80, Darruu cursed the cold. It was 80 now, and he was uncomfortably cold. He would have to stay that way for most of the day, at least, until in a moment of privacy he could make the necessary adjustments. Around him, the Earthers seemed to be perspiring and feeling discomfort because of the heat.

The bus filled finally, and spurted across the field to a high domed building of gleaming steel and green plastic. The driver said, "First stop is customs. Have your papers ready."

Inside, Harris found his

baggage already waiting for him at a counter labelled HAM-HAT. There were two suitcases, both of them with topological secret compartments. He surrendered his passport and, when told to do so, pressed his thumb to the opener-plate. The suitcases sprang open. The customs man poked through them perfunctorily, nodded, said, "Anything to declare?"

"Nothing."

"Okay. Close 'em up."

Harris locked the suitcases again, and the customs official briefly touched a tracer-stamp to them. It left no visible imprint, but the photonic scanners at every door would be watching for the radiations, and no one with an unstamp to them. It left no visible could get through the electronic barriers.

"Next stop is Immigration, Major."

At Immigration they studied his passport briefly, noted that he was a government employee, and passed him along to Health. Here he felt a moment of alarm; about one out of every fifty incoming passengers from a starship was detained for a comprehensive medical exam, and if the finger fell upon him the game was up right here. Ten seconds in front of a fluoroscope would tell them that nobody with that kind of skele-

tal structure had ever been born in Cincinnati, Ohio.

He got through with nothing more than a rudimentary checkup. At the last desk his passport was stamped with a re-entry visa, and the clerk said, "You haven't been on Earth for a long time, eh, Major?"

"Not in ten years. Hope things haven't changed too much."

"The women are still the same, anyway." The clerk shuffled Harris' papers together, stuck them back in the portfolio, and handed them to him. "Everything's in order. Go straight ahead and out the door to your left."

Harris thanked him and moved along, gripping one suitcase in each hand. A month ago, at the beginning of his journey, the suitcases had seemed heavy to him. But that had been on Darruu; here they weighed only two-thirds as much. He carried them jauntily.

Soon it will be spring on Darruu, he thought. The red-leaved jasaar trees would blossom and their perfume would fill the air.

With an angry inner scowl he blanked out the thought. He was Major Abner Harris, late of Cincinnati, here on Earth for eight months' vacation.

He knew his orders. He was

to establish residence, avoid detection, and in the second week of his stay make contact with the chief Darruui agent on Earth. Further instructions would come from him.

CHAPTER II

IT TOOK twenty minutes by helitaxi to reach the metropolitan area from the spaceport. Handling the Terran currency as if he had used it all his life, Harris paid the driver, tipped him, and got out. He had asked for and been taken to a hotel in the heart of the city—the Spaceways Hotel. There was one of them in every major spaceport city in the galaxy; the spacelines operated them jointly, for the benefit of travelers who had no place to stay on the planet of their destination.

He signed in and was given a room on the 58th floor. The Earther at the desk said, "You don't mind heights, do you, Major?"

"Not at all."

He gave the boy who had carried his bags a quarter-unit piece, received grateful thanks, and locked the door. For the first time since leaving Darruu he was really *alone*. Thumbing open his suitcases, he performed the series of complex stress-presures that gave access to the

hidden areas of the grips; miraculously, the suitcases expanded to nearly twice their former volume. There was nothing like packing your belongings in a tesseract if you wanted to keep the customs men away from them.

Busily, he unpacked.

First thing out was a small device which fit neatly and virtually invisibly to the inside of the door. It was a jammer for spybeams. It insured privacy.

A disruptor-pistol came next. He slipped it into his tunic-pocket. Several books; a flask of Darruui wine; a photograph of his birth-tree. Bringing these things had not increased his risk, since if they had been found it would only be after much more incriminating things had come to light.

The subspace communicator, for example. Or the narrow-beam amplifier he would use in making known his presence to the other members of the Darruui cadre on Earth.

He finished unpacking, re-stored his suitcases to their three-dimensional state, and took a tiny scalpel from the toolkit he had unpacked. Quickly stripping off his trousers, he laid bare the desensitized area in the fleshy part of his thigh, stared for a moment at the network of fine

silver threads underlying the flesh, and, with three careful twists of the scalpel's edge, altered the thermostatic control in his body.

He shivered a moment; then, gradually, he began to feel warm. Closing the wound, he applied nuplast; moments later it had healed. He dressed again.

He surveyed his room. Twenty feet square, with a bed, a desk, a closet, a dresser. An air-conditioning grid in the ceiling. A steady greenish electroluminescent glow. An oval window beneath which was a set of polarizing controls. A molecular bath and washstand. Not bad for twenty units a week, he told himself, trying to think the way an Earthman might.

The room-calendar told him it was five-thirty in the afternoon, 22 May 2562. He was not supposed to make contact with Central for ten days or more; he computed that that would mean the first week of June. Until then he was simply to act the part of a Terran on vacation.

The surgeons had made certain minor alterations in his metabolism to give him a taste for Terran food and drink and to make it possible for him to digest the carbohydrates of which Terrans were so fond. They had prepared him well for playing the part of Major Abner Harris. And he had

been equipped with fifty thousand units of Terran money, enough to last him quite a while.

Carefully he adjusted the device on the door to keep intruders out while he was gone. Anyone entering the room would get a nasty jolt of energy now. He checked his wallet, made sure he had his money with him, and pushed the door-opener.

It slid back and he stepped through into the hallway. At that moment someone walking rapidly down the hall collided with him, spinning him around. He felt a soft body pressed against his.

A woman!

The immediate reaction that boiled up in him was one of anger, but he blocked the impulse to strike her before it rose. On Darruu, a woman who jostled a Servant of the Spirit could expect a sound whipping. But this was not Darruu.

He remembered a phrase from his indoctrination: *it will help to create a sexual relationship for yourself on Earth.*

The surgeons had changed his metabolism in that respect, too, making him able to feel sexual desires for Terran females. The theory was that no one would expect a disguised alien to engage in romantic affairs with Terrans;

it would be a form of camouflage.

"Excuse me!" Harris and the female Terran said simultaneously.

His training reminded him that simultaneous outbursts were cause for laughter on Earth. He laughed. So did she. Then she said, "I guess I didn't see you. I was hurrying along the corridor and I wasn't looking."

"The fault was mine," Harris insisted. *Terran males are obstinately chivalrous*, he had been told. "I opened my door and just charged out blind. I'm sorry."

She was tall, nearly his height, with soft, lustrous yellow hair and clear pink skin. She wore a black body-tight sheath that left her shoulders and the upper hemispheres of her breasts uncovered. Harris found her attractive. Wonderingly he thought, *Now I know they've changed me. She has hair on her scalp and enormous bulging breasts and yet I feel desire for her.*

She said, "It's my fault and it's your fault. That's the way most collisions are caused. Let's not argue about that. My name is Beth Baldwin."

"Major Abner Harris."

"Major?"

"Interstellar Development Corps."

"Oh," she said. "Just arrived on Earth?"

He nodded. "I'm on vacation. My last hop was Alpherats IV." He smiled and said, "It's silly to stand out here in the hall discussing things. I was on my way down below to get something to eat. How about joining me?"

She looked doubtful for a moment, but only for a moment. She brightened. "I'm game."

THEY TOOK the gravshaft down and ate in the third-level restaurant, an automated affair with individual conveyor-belts bringing food to each table. Part of his hypnotic training had been intended to see him through situations such as this, and so he ordered a dinner for two, complete with wine, without a hitch.

She did not seem shy. She told him that she was employed on Rigel XII, and had come to Earth on a business trip; she had arrived only the day before. She was twenty-nine, unmarried, a native-born Earther like himself, who had been living in the Rigel system the past four years.

"And now tell me about you," she said, reaching for the wine decanter.

"There isn't much to tell. I'm a fairly stodgy career man in the IDC, age forty-two, and this is the first day I've spent on Earth in ten years."

"It must feel strange."

"It does."

"How long is your vacation?"

He shrugged. "Six to eight months. I can have more if I really want it. When do you go back to Rigel?"

She smiled strangely at him. "I may not go back at all. Depends on whether I can find what I'm looking for on Earth."

"And what are you looking for?"

She grinned. "My business," she said.

"Sorry."

"Never mind the apologies. Let's have some more wine."

After Harris had settled up the not inconsiderable matter of the bill, they left the hotel and went outside to stroll. The streets were crowded; a clock atop a distant building told Harris that the time was shortly after seven. He felt warm now that he had adjusted his temperature controls, and the unfamiliar foods and wines in his stomach gave him an oddly queasy feeling, though he had enjoyed the meal.

The girl slipped her hand through his looped arm and squeezed the inside of his elbow. Harris grinned. He said, "I was afraid it was going to be an awfully lonely vacation."

"Me too. You can be tre-

mendously alone on a planet that has twenty billion people on it."

They walked on. In the middle of the street a troupe of acrobats was performing, using nullgrav devices to add to their abilities. Harris chuckled and tossed them a coin, and a bronzed girl saluted to him from the top of a human pyramid.

Night was falling. Harris considered the incongruity of walking arm-in-arm with an Earthgirl, with his belly full of Earth foods, and enjoying it.

Darruu seemed impossibly distant now. It lay eleven hundred light-years from Earth; its star was visible only as part of a mass of blurred dots of light.

But yet he knew it was there. He missed it.

"You're worrying about something," the girl said.

"It's an old failing of mine."

He was thinking: *I was born a Servant of the Spirit, and so I was chosen to go to Earth. I may never return to Darruu again.*

As the sky darkened they strolled on, over a delicate golden bridge spanning a river whose dark depths twinkled with myriad points of light. Together they stared down at the water, and at the stars reflected in it. She moved closer to him, and her

warmth against his body was pleasing to him.

Eleven hundred light-years from home.

Why am I here?

He knew the answer. Titanic conflict was shaping in the universe. The Predictors held that the cataclysm was no more than two hundred years away. Darruu would stand against its ancient adversary Medlin, and all the worlds of the universe would be ranged on one side or on the other.

He was here as an ambassador. Earth was a mighty force in the galaxy—so mighty that it would resent the role it really played, that of pawn between Darruu and Medlin. Darruu wanted Terran support in the conflict to come. Obtaining it was a delicate problem in consent engineering. A cadre of disguised Darruui planted on Earth, gradually manipulating public opinion toward the Darruu camp and away from Medlin—that was the plan, and Harris, once Aar Khiilom, was one of its agents.

They walked until the hour had grown very late, and then turned back toward the hotel. Harris was confident now that he had established the sort of relationship that was likely to shield him from all suspicion of his true origin.

He said, "What do we do now?"

"Suppose we buy a bottle of something and have a party in your room?" she suggested.

"My room's a frightful mess," Harris said, thinking of the many things in there he would not want her to see. "How about yours?"

"It doesn't matter."

They stopped at an autobar and he fed half-unit pieces into a machine until the chime sounded and a fully wrapped bottle slid out the receiving tray. Harris tucked it under his arm, made a mock-courteous bow to her, and they continued on their way to the hotel.

The signal came just as they entered the lobby.

IT REACHED Harris in the form of a sudden twinge in the abdomen; that was where the amplifier had been embedded. He felt it as three quick impulses, *rasp rasp rasp*, followed after a brief pause by a repeat.

The signal had only one meaning: *Emergency. Get in touch with your contact-man at once.*

Her hand tightened on his arm. "Are you all right? You look so pale!"

In a dry voice he said, "Maybe we'd better postpone our party a few minutes. I'm—not quite well."

"Oh! Can I help?"

He shook his head. "It's—

something I picked up on Alpheratz." Turning, he handed her the packaged bottle and said, "It'll just take me a few minutes to get myself settled down. Suppose you go to your room and wait for me there."

"But if you're sick I ought to—"

"No. Beth, I have to take care of this myself, without anyone else watching. Okay?"

"Okay," she said doubtfully.

"Thanks. Be with you as soon as I can."

They rode the gravshaft together to the 58th floor and went their separate ways, she to her room, he to his. The signal in his abdomen was repeating itself steadily now with quiet urgency: *Rasp rasp rasp. Rasp rasp rasp. Rasp rasp rasp.*

He neutralized the force-field on the door with a quick energy impulse and opened the door. Stepping inside quickly, he activated the spy-beam jammer again. Beads of sweat were starting to form on his skin.

Rasp rasp rasp. Rasp rasp rasp.

He opened the closet, took out the tiny narrow-beam amplifier he had hidden there, and tuned it to the frequency of the emergency signal. Immediately the rasping stopped as the narrow-beam amplifier covered the wavelength.

Moments passed. The amplifier picked up a voice speaking in the code devised for use by Darruui agents alone.

"Identify yourself."

Harris identified himself according to the regular procedure. He went on to say, "I arrived on Earth today. My instructions were not to report to you for about two weeks."

"I know that. There's an emergency situation."

"What kind of emergency?"

"There are Medlin agents on Earth. Normal procedures will have to be altered. Meet me at once." He gave an address. Harris memorized it and repeated it. The contact was broken.

Meet me at once. The orders had to be interpreted literally. *At once* meant right now, not tomorrow afternoon. His tryst with the yellow-haired Earthgirl would just have to wait.

He picked up the house-phone and asked for her room. A moment later he heard her voice.

"Hello?"

"Beth, this is Abner Harris."

"How are you? Everything under control? I'm waiting for you."

Hesitantly he said, "I'm fine now. But—Beth, I don't know how to say this—will

you believe me when I say that a friend of mine just phoned, and wants me to meet him right away downtown?"

"Now? But it's after eleven!"

"I know. He's—a strange sort."

"I thought you didn't have any friends on Earth, Major Harris. You said you were lonely."

"He's not really a *friend*. He's a business associate. From IDC."

"Well, I'm not accustomed to having men stand me up. But I don't have any choice, do I?"

"Good girl. Make it a date for breakfast in the morning instead?"

"Lousy substitute, but it'll have to do. See you at nine."

CHAPTER III

THE RENDEZVOUS-POINT the other operative had named was a street corner in another quarter of the city. Harris hired a heli-taxi to take him there.

It was a nightclub district, all bright lights and brassy music. A figure leaned against the lamppost on the southeast corner of the street. Harris crossed to him. In the brightness of the streetlamp he saw the man's face: lean, lantern-jawed, solemn.

Harris said, "Pardon me,

friend. Do you know where I can buy a mask for the carnival?"

It was the recognition-querry. The other answered, in a deep harsh voice, "Masks are expensive. Stay home." He thrust out his hand.

Harris took it, gripping the wrist in the Darruui way, and grinned. Eleven hundred light-years from home and he beheld a fellow Servant of the Spirit! "I'm Major Abner Harris."

"Hello. I'm John Carver. There's a table waiting for us inside."

"Inside" turned out to be the Nine Planets Club, across the street. The atmosphere inside was steamy and smoke-clouded; bubbles of light drifted round the ceiling. A row of long-limbed nudes pranced gaily to the accompaniment of the noise that passed for music on Terra. The surgeons, Harris thought, had never managed to instill a liking for Terran music in him.

Carver said quietly, "Have you had any trouble since you arrived?"

"No. Should I expect any?"

The lean man shrugged. "There are one hundred Medlin agents on Earth right now. Yesterday we discovered a cache of secret Medlin documents. We have the names of the hundred and their photo-

graphs. We also know they plan to wipe us out."

"How many Darruui are on Earth?"

"You are the tenth to arrive."

Harris' eyes widened. One hundred Medlins against ten Darruui! "Stiff odds," he said.

Carver nodded. "But we know their identities. We can strike first. Unless we eliminate them, we will not be able to proceed with our work here."

The music reached an ear-splitting crescendo. Moodily Harris stared at the nude chorus-line as it gyrated. He sensed some glandular disturbance at the sight, and frowned. By Darruui standards, the girls were obscenely ugly.

But this was not Darruu.

He said, "How do we go about eliminating them?"

"You have weapons. I'll supply you with the necessary information. If you can get ten of them before they get you, you'll be all right." He drew forth a billfold and extracted a snapshot from it. "Here's your first one, now. Kill her and report back to me. You can find her at the Spaceways Hotel."

Harris felt a jolt. "I'm staying at that hotel."

"Indeed? Here. Look at the picture."

Harris took the photo from the other. It was a tridim in full color. It showed a blonde girl wearing a low-cut black sheath.

Controlling his voice, he said, "This girl's too pretty to be a Medlin agent."

"That's why she's so deadly," Carver said. "Kill her first. She goes under the name of Beth Baldwin."

Harris stared at the photo a long while. Then he nodded. "Okay. I'll get in touch with you again when the job's done."

IT WAS nearly two in the morning when he returned to the hotel. He had spent nearly an hour with the man who called himself John Carver. He felt tired, confused, faced with decisions that frightened him.

Beth Baldwin a Medlin spy? How improbable that seemed! But yet Carver had had her photo.

It was his job to kill her, now. He was a Servant of the Spirit. He could not betray his trust.

First I'll find out for certain, though.

He took the gravshaft to the 58th floor, but instead of going to his room he turned left and headed toward the room whose number she had given him—5820. He paused

a moment, then nudged the door-signal.

There was no immediate response, so he nudged it again. This time he heard the sound of a doorscanner humming just above him, telling him that she was awake and just within the door.

He said, "It's me—Abner. I have to see you, Beth."

"Hold on," came the sleepy reply from inside. "Let me get something on."

A moment passed, and then the door slid open. Beth smiled at him. She had "put something on," but the something had not been much—a flimsy gown that concealed her body as if she were wearing so much gauze.

But Harris was not interested in her body just now, attractive though it was. She held a tiny glittering weapon in her hand. Harris recognized the weapon. It was the Medlin version of the disruptor-pistol.

"Come on in, Abner."

Numbly he stepped forward, and the door shut behind him. Beth gestured with the disruptor.

"Sit down over there."

"How come the gun, Beth?"

"You know that answer without my having to tell it to you. Now that you've seen Carver, you know who I am."

He nodded. "A Medlin agent."

It was hard to believe. He stared at the girl who stood ten feet from him, a disruptor trained at his skull. The Medlin surgeons evidently were as skillful as those of Darruu, it seemed, for the wiry pebble-skinned Medlins were even less humanoid than the Darruui—and yet he would swear that those breasts, the flaring hips, the long well-formed legs, were genuine.

She said, "We had information on you from the moment you entered the orbit of Earth, Abner—or should I say Aar Khiilom?"

"How did you know that name?"

She laughed lightly. "The same way I knew you were from Darruu, the same way I knew the exact moment you were going to come out of your room before."

"The same way you knew I was coming here to kill you just now?"

She nodded.

Harris frowned. "Medlins aren't telepathic. There isn't a single telepathic race in the galaxy."

"None that *you* know about, anyway."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing," she said.

He shrugged. Apparently the Medlin spy system was formidably well organized. This nonsense about telepathy

was merely to cloud the trail. But the one fact about which there was no doubt was—

"I came here to kill you," Harris said. "But you trapped me. I guess you'll kill me now."

"Wrong. I just want to talk," she said.

"If you want to talk, put some clothing on. Having you sitting around like this disturbs my powers of conversation."

She said pleasantly, "Oh? You mean this artificial body of mine stirs some response in that artificial body of yours? How interesting!" Without turning her back on him, she drew a robe from the closet and slipped it on over the filmy gown. "There. Is that easier on your glandular balance?"

"Somewhat."

The Darruui began to fidget. There was no way he could activate his emergency signal without moving his hands, and any sudden hand-motion was likely to be fatal. He sat motionless while sweat streamed down the skin they had grafted to his own.

Beth said, "You're one of ten Darruui on Earth. Others are on their way, but there are only ten of you here now. Correct me if I'm wrong."

"Why should I?" Harris said tightly.

She nodded. "A good point.

But I assure you we have all the information about you we need, so you needn't try to make up tales. To continue: you and your outfit are here for the purpose of subverting Terran allegiance and winning Earth over to the side of Darruu."

"And you Medlins are here for much the same kind of reason."

"That's where you're wrong," the girl said. "We're here to help the Terrans, not to dominate them. We Medlins don't believe in violence if peaceful means will accomplish our goals."

"Very nice words," Harris said. "But how can *you* help the Terrans?"

"It's a matter of genetics. This isn't the place to explain in detail."

He let that pass. "So you deliberately threw yourself in contact with me earlier, let me take you out to dinner, walked around arm-in-arm—and all this time you knew I was a disguised Darruui?"

"Of course. I also knew that when you pretended to be sick it was because you had to contact your chief operative, and that when you said you were going to visit a friend you were attending an emergency rendezvous. I also knew what your friend Carver was going to tell you to do, which is why I had my gun ready

when you rang."

He stared at her. "Suppose I *hadn't* gotten that emergency message. We were going to come here and drink and probably make love. Would you have gone to bed with me even knowing what you knew?"

"Most likely," she said without emotion. "It would have been interesting to see what sort of biological reactions the Darrui surgeons are capable of building."

A FLASH of hatred ran through Harris-Khiilom. He had been raised to hate Medlins anyway; they were the ancestral enemies of his people, galactic rivals for four thousand years or more. Only the fact that she was clad in the flesh of a handsome Earthgirl had kept Harris from feeling his normal revulsion for a Medlin.

But now it surged forth at this revelation of her calm and callous biological "curiosity."

He wondered how far her callousness extended. Also, how good her aim was.

He mastered his anger and said, "That's a pretty cold-blooded way of thinking, Beth."

"Maybe. I'm sorry about it."

"I'll bet you are."

She smiled at him. "Let's forget about that, shall we? I

want to tell you a few things."

"Such as?"

"For one: did you know that you're fundamentally disloyal to the Darrui cause?"

Harris laughed harshly. "You're crazy!"

"Afraid not. Listen to me, Abner. You're homesick for Darruu. You never wanted to come here in the first place. You were born into a caste that has certain obligations, and you're fulfilling those obligations. But you don't know very much about what you're doing here on Earth, and for half a plugged unit you'd give the whole thing up and go back to Darruu."

"Very clever," he said stonily. "Now give me my horoscope for the next six months."

"Easy enough. You'll come to our headquarters and learn why my people are on Earth—"

"I know that one already."

"You *think* you do," she said smoothly. "Don't interrupt. You'll learn why we're on Earth; once you've seen that, you'll join us and help to protect Earth against Darruu."

"And why will I do all these incredible things?"

"Because it's in your personality makeup to do them. And because you're falling in love."

"With a lot of fake female flesh plastered over a scrawny Medlin body? Hah!"

She remained calm. Harris measured the distance between them, wondering whether she would use the weapon after all. A disruptor broiled the neural tissue; death was instantaneous and fairly ghastly.

He decided to risk it. His assignment was to kill Medlins, not to let himself be killed by them. He had nothing to lose by making the attempt.

In a soft voice he said, "You didn't answer. Do you really think I'd fall in love with something like *you*?"

"Biologically we're Earthers now, not Medlins or Darruui. It's possible."

"Maybe you're right. After all, I *did* ask you to cover yourself up." He smiled and said, "I'm all confused. I need time to think things over."

"Of course. You—"

He sprang from the chair and covered the ten feet between them in two big bounds, stretching out one hand to grab the hand that held the disruptor. He deflected the weapon toward the ceiling. She did not fire. He closed on her wrist and forced her to drop the tiny pistol. Pressed against her, he stared into eyes blazing with anger.

The anger melted suddenly

into passion. He stepped back, reaching for his own gun, not willing to have such close contact with her. She was too dangerous. Better to kill her right now, he thought. She's just a Medlin. A deadly one.

He started to draw the weapon from his tunic. Suddenly she lifted her hand; there was the twinkle of something bright between her fingers, and then Harris recoiled, helpless, as the bolt of a stunner struck him in the face like a club against the back of his skull.

She fired again. He struggled to get his gun out, but his muscles would not obey.

He toppled forward, paralyzed.

CHAPTER IV

HARRIS felt a teeth-chattering chill as he began to come awake. The stunner-bolt had temporarily overloaded his motor neurons, and the body's escape from the frustration of paralysis was unconsciousness. Now he was waking, and the strength was ebbing slowly and painfully back into his muscles.

The light of morning streamed in through a depolarized window on the left wall of the unfamiliar room in which he found himself. He felt stiff and sore all over, and realized he had spent the night—where?—

He groped in his pockets. His weapons were gone; they had left his wallet.

He got unsteadily to his feet and surveyed the room. The window was beyond his reach; there was no sign of a door. Obviously some section of the wall folded away to admit people to the room, but the door and door-jamb, wherever they were, must have been machined as smoothly as a couple of job-blocks, because there was no sign of a break in the wall.

He looked up. There was a grid in the ceiling. Airconditioning, no doubt—and probably a spy-mechanism also. He stared at the grid and said, "Okay. I'm awake now. You can come work me over."

There was no immediate response. Surreptitiously Harris slipped a hand inside his waistband and squeezed a fold of flesh between his thumb and index finger. The action set in operation a minute amplifier embedded there; a distress signal, directionally modulated, was sent out to any Darruui agents who might be within a thousand-mile radius. He completed the gesture by lazily scratching his chest, stretching, yawning.

He waited.

Finally a segment of the door flipped upward out of sight, and three figures entered.

He recognized one of them: Beth. She smiled at him and said, "Good morning, Major."

Harris glared sourly at her. Behind her stood two males—one an ordinary-looking sort of Earther, the other rather special. He was about six feet six, well-proportioned for his height, with a regularity of feature that seemed startlingly beautiful.

Beth said, "Major Abner Harris, formerly Aar Khiilom of Darruu—this is Paul Coburn of Medlin Intelligence and David Wrynn of Earth."

"A real Earthman? Not a phony like the rest of us?"

Wrynn smiled pleasantly and said, "I assure you I'm a home-grown product, Major Harris." His voice was like the mellow boom of a well-tuned cello.

The Darruui folded his arms. "Well. How nice of you to introduce us all. Now what?"

"Still belligerent," he heard Beth murmur to the other Medlin, Coburn. Coburn nodded. The giant Earthman merely looked unhappy in a calm sort of way.

Harris eyed them all coldly. "If you're going to torture me, why not get started with it?"

"Who said anything about torture?" Beth asked.

"Why else would you bring me here? Obviously you want

to wring information from me. Well, go ahead. I'm ready for you."

Coburn chuckled and fingered his double chins. "Don't you think we know that torture's useless on you? That if we tried any kind of forcible neural extraction of information from your mind your memory-chambers would automatically short-circuit?"

Harris' jaw dropped. "How did you know—" He stopped. The Medlins evidently had a fantastically efficient spy service. The filter-circuit in his brain was a highly secret development.

Beth said, "Relax and listen to us. We aren't out to torture you. We know already all you can tell us."

"Doubtful. But go ahead and talk."

"We know how many Dar-ruui are on Earth. And we know approximately where they are. We'd like you to serve as a contact man for us."

"And do what?"

"Kill the other nine Dar-ruui on Earth," Beth said simply.

Harris smiled. "Is there any special reason why I should do this?"

"For the good of the universe."

He laughed derisively. "For the good of Medlin, you mean."

"No. Listen to me. When we arrived on Earth—it was years ago, by the way—we quickly discovered that a new race was evolving here. A super-race, you might say. One with abnormal physical and mental powers. But in most cases children of this new race were killed or mentally stunted before they reached maturity. People tend to resent being made obsolete—and even a super-child is unable to defend himself until he's learned how. By then it's usually too late."

It was a nice fairy-tale, Harris thought. He made no comment, but listened with apparent interest.

Beth continued, "We discovered isolated members of this new race here and there on Earth. We decided to help them—knowing they would help us, some day, when it became necessary. We protected these children. We brought them together and raised them in safety. David Wrynn here is one of our first discoveries."

Harris glanced at the big Earthman. "So you're a super-man?"

Wrynn smiled. "I'm somewhat better equipped for life than most other Earthmen. My children will be as far beyond me as I am beyond my parents."

"Our purpose here on Earth

is to aid this evolving race until it's capable of taking care of itself—which won't be too long now. There are more than a hundred of them, of which thirty are adult. But now Darruui agents have started to arrive on Earth. Their purpose is to obstruct us, to interfere with our actions, and to win Earth over to what they think is their 'cause.' They don't see that they're backing a dead horse."

"Tell me," Harris said. "What's your motive in bringing into being this super-race?"

"Motive?" Beth said. "You Darruui always think in terms of motives, don't you? Profit and reward. Major, there's nothing in this for us but the satisfaction of knowing that we're bringing something wonderful into being in the universe."

Harris swallowed that with much salt. The concept of altruism was not unknown on Darruu, certainly, but it seemed highly improbable that a planet would go to the trouble of sending emissaries across space for the sole purpose of serving as midwives to an emerging race of super-beings on Earth.

No, he thought. It was simply part of an elaborate propaganda maneuver whose motives did not lie close to the surface. There were no super-

men. Wrynn was probably a Medlin himself, on whom the surgeons had done a specially good job.

Whatever the Medlins' motive, he determined to play along with them. By now Carver had probably picked up his distress signal and had worked out the location of the place where he was being held.

He said, "So you're busily raising a breed of super-Earthmen, and you want me to help? How?"

"We told you. By disposing of your comrades before they make things complicated for us."

"You're asking me to commit treason against my people, in other words."

"We know what sort of a man you are," Beth said. "You aren't in sympathy with the Darruui imperialistic ideals. You may *think* you are, but you aren't."

I'll play along, Harris thought. He said, "You're right. I didn't want to take the job on Earth in the first place. What can I do to help?"

Coburn and Beth exchanged glances. The "Earthman" Wrynn merely smiled.

Beth said, "I knew you'd cooperate. The first target is the man who calls himself Carver. Get rid of him and the Darruui agents are without

a nerve-center. After him, the other eight will be easy targets."

"How do you know I won't trick you once you've released me?" Harris said.

Coburn said, "We have ways of keeping watch."

Harris nodded. "I'll go after Carver first. I'll get in touch with you as soon as he's out of the way."

IT SEEMED too transparent, Harris thought, when they had set him loose. He found himself in a distant quarter of the city, nearly an hour's journey by helitaxi from his hotel.

All this talk of supermen and altruism! It made no sense, he thought—but Medlin propaganda was devious stuff, and he had good reason to distrust it.

Were they as simple as all that, though, to release him merely on his promise of good faith? If they were truly altruistic, of course, it made sense; but he knew the Medlins too well to believe that. Darkly he thought he must be part of some larger Medlin plan.

Well, let Carver worry about it, he thought.

Though he was hungry, he knew he had no time to bother about breakfast until he got in touch with the Darruui chief agent. He signalled for

a helitaxi and gave his destination as the Spaceways Hotel.

When he finally arrived, fifty minutes later, he headed straight for his room, activated the narrow-beam communicator, and waited until the metallic voice from the speaker said in code, "Carver here."

"Harris speaking."

"You've escaped?"

"They set me free. It's a long story. Did you get a directional fix on the building?"

"Yes. Why did they let you go?"

"I promised to become a Medlin secret agent," Harris said. "My first assignment is to assassinate you."

The chuckle that came from the speaker grid held little mirth. Carver said, "Fill me in on everything that's happened to you since last night."

"For one thing, the Medlins know everything, but *everything*. When I went to visit the girl last night she was waiting for me with a gun. She stunned me and carted me off to the Medlin headquarters. When I woke up they gave me some weird line about raising a breed of super-Earthmen, and would I help them in this noble cause?"

"You agreed?"

"Of course. They let me go and I'm supposed to eradicate

all the Darruui on Earth, beginning with you."

"The others are well scattered," Carver said.

"They seem to know where they are."

Carver was silent for a moment. Then he said, "We'll have to strike at once. We'll attack the Medlin headquarters and kill as many as we can. Do you really think they trust you?"

"Either that or they're using me as bait for an elaborate trap," Harris said.

"That's more likely. Well, we'll take their bait. Only they won't be able to handle us once they've caught hold of us."

Carver broke contact. Carefully Harris packed the equipment away again.

He breakfasted in the hotel restaurant after a prolonged session under the molecular showerbath to remove the fatigue and grime of his night's imprisonment. The meal was close to tasteless, but he needed the nourishment.

Returning to his room, he locked himself in and threw himself wearily on the bed. He was tired and deeply troubled.

Supermen, he thought.

Did it make sense for the Medlins to rear a possible galactic conqueror? Earthmen were dangerous enough as it was; though the spheres of

galactic influence still were divided as of old between Darruu and Medlin, the Earthmen in their bare three hundred years of galactic contact had taken giant strides toward holding a major place in the affairs of the universe.

Their colonies stretched halfway across the galaxy. The Interstellar Development Corps of which he claimed to be a member had planted Earthmen indiscriminately on any uninhabited world of the galaxy that was not claimed by Darruu or Medlin.

And the Medlins, the ancient enemies of his people, the race he had been taught all his life to regard as the embodiment of evil—these were aiding Earthmen to progress to a plane of development far beyond anything either Darruu or Medlin had attained?

Ridiculous, he thought. No race breeds its own destruction knowingly. And the Medlins are no fools.

Certainly not fools enough to let me go on a mere promise that I'll turn traitor and aid them, he thought.

He shook his head. After a while he uncorked his precious flask of Darruui wine and poured a small quantity. The velvet-textured dark wine of his homeworld soothed him a little, but the

ultimate result was simply to increase his already painful longing for home. Soon, he thought, it would be harvest-time, and the first bottles of new wine would reach the shops. This would be the first year that he had not tasted the year's vintage while it still held the bouquet of youth.

Instead I find myself on a strange planet in a strange skin, caught up in the coils of the devil Medlins. He scowled darkly, and took another sip of wine to ease the ache his heart felt.

CHAPTER V

A DAY of nerve-twisting inactivity passed. Harris did not hear from Carver, nor did any of the Medlins contact him. Once he checked Beth Baldwin's room at the hotel, but no one answered the door, and when he inquired at the desk he learned that she had moved out earlier in the day, leaving no forwarding address. It figured. She had established quarters in the hotel only long enough to come in touch with him, and, that done, had left.

Regretfully Harris wished he had had a chance to try that biological experiment with her, after all. Medlin though she was, his body was now Terran-oriented, and it

might have been an interesting experience. Well, no chance for that now.

He ate alone, in the hotel restaurant, and kept close to his room all day. Toward evening his signal-amplifier buzzed. He activated the communicator and spoke briefly with Carver, who gave him an address and ordered him to report there immediately.

It was a shabby, old-fashioned building far to the east, at the edge of the river. He rode up eight stories in a gravshaft that vibrated so badly he expected to be hurled back down at any moment, and made his way down a poorly-lit dusty corridor to a weather-beaten door that gave off the faint yellow glow that indicated a protection-field.

Harris felt the gentle tingling in his stomach that told him he was getting a radionic scanning. Finally the door opened. Carver said to him, "Come in."

There were four others in the room—a pudgy balding man named Reynolds, a youthful smiling man who called himself Tompkins, a short, cold-eyed man introduced as McDermott, and a lanky fellow who spoke his name drawlingly as Patterson. As each of them in turn was introduced, he gave the Dar-rui recognition signal.

"The other four of us are elsewhere in the eastern hemisphere of Earth," Carver said. "But six should be enough to handle the situation."

Harris glanced at his five comrades. "What are you planning to do?"

"Attack the Medlins, of course. We'll have to wipe them out at once."

Harris nodded. Inwardly he felt troubled; it seemed to him now that the Medlins had been strangely sincere in releasing him, though he knew that that was preposterous. He said, "How?"

"They trust you. You're one of their agents, so far as they think."

"Right."

"You'll return to them and tell them you've disposed of me, as instructed. Only you'll be bearing a subsonic on your body. Once you're inside, you activate it and knock them out—you'll be shielded."

"And I kill them when they're unconscious?"

"Exactly," Carver said. "You can't be humane with Medlins. It's like being humane with bloodsucking bats or with snakes."

The Daruui called McDermott said, "We'll wait outside until we get the signal that you've done the job. If you need help, just let us know."

Harris moistened his lips

and nodded. "It sounds all right."

Carver said, "Reynolds, insert the subsonic."

The bald man produced a small metal pellet the size of a tiny bead, from which three tantalum filaments projected. He indicated to Harris that he should roll up his trousers to the thigh.

Instead, Harris dropped them. Reynolds drew a scalpel from somewhere and lifted the flap of nerveless flesh that served as trapdoor to the network of devices underneath. With steady, unquivering fingers, he affixed the bead to the minute wires already set in Harris' leg, and closed the wound with nuplast.

Carver said, "You activate it by pressing against the left-hip neural nexus. It's self-shielding for a distance of three feet around you, so make sure none of your victims are any closer than that."

"It radiates a pretty potent subsonic," Reynolds said. "Guaranteed knockout for a radius of forty feet."

"Suppose the Medlins are shielded against subsonics?" Harris asked.

Carver chuckled. "This is a variable-cycle transmitter. If they've perfected anything that can shield against a random wave, we might as well

give up right now. But I'm inclined to doubt they have."

ALL VERY SIMPLE, Harris thought as he rode across town to the Medlin headquarters. Simply walk in, smile politely, stun them all with the subsonic, and boil their brains with your disruptor.

He paused outside the building, thinking.

Around him, Earthmen hurried to their homes. Night was falling. The stars blanketed the sky, white flecks against dark cloth. Many of those stars swore allegiance to Darruu. Others, to Medlin.

Which was right? Which wrong?

A block away, five fellow-Darruui lurked, ready to come to his aid if he had any trouble in killing the Medlins. He doubted that he would have trouble, if the subsonic were as effective as Carver seemed to think.

For forty Darruui years he had been trained to hate the Medlins. Now, in a few minutes, he would be doing what was considered the noblest act a Servant of the Spirit could perform—ridding the universe of a pack of them. Yet he felt no sense of anticipated glory. It would simply be murder, the murder of strangers.

He entered the building.

The Medlin headquarters

were at the top of the building, in a large penthouse loft. He rode up in the gravshaft and it seemed to him that he could feel the pressure of the tiny subsonic generator in his thigh. He knew that was just an illusion, but the presence of the metal bead irritated him all the same.

He stood for a moment in a scanner field. A door flicked back suddenly, out of sight, and a strange face peered at him—an Earthman face, on the surface of things at least.

The Earth man beckoned him in.

"I'm Armin Moulton," he said in a deep voice. "You're Harris?"

"That's right."

"Beth is waiting to see you."

The subsonic has a range of forty feet in any direction, Harris thought. *No one should be closer to you than three feet.*

He was shown into an inner room well furnished with drapes and hangings. Beth stood in the middle of the room, smiling at him. She wore thick, shapeless clothes, quite unlike the seductive garb she had had on when Harris first collided with her.

There were others in the room. Harris recognized the other Medlin, Coburn, and the giant named Wrynn who claimed to be a super-Earth-

man. There was another woman of Wrynn's size in the room, a great golden creature nearly a foot taller than Harris, and two people of normal size who were probably Medlins.

"Well?" Beth asked.

In a tight voice Harris said, "He's dead. I've just come from there."

"How did you carry it out?"

"Disruptor," Harris said. "It was—unpleasant. For me as well as him."

He was quivering with tension. He made no attempt to conceal it, since a man who had just killed his direct superior might be expected to show some signs of extreme tension.

"Eight to go," Coburn said. "And four are in another hemisphere."

"Who are these people?" Harris asked.

Beth introduced them. The two normal-sized ones were disguised Medlins; the giant girl was Wrynn's wife, a super-woman. Harris frowned thoughtfully. There were a hundred Medlin agents on Earth. Four of them were right in this room, and it was reasonable to expect that two or three more might be within the forty-foot range of the concealed subsonic.

Not a bad haul at all. Harris began to tremble.

Beth said, "I suppose you

don't even know who and where the other Darruui are yourself, do you?"

Harris shook his head. "I've only been on Earth a couple of days, you know. There wasn't time to make contact with anyone but Carver. I have no idea how to do so."

He stared levelly at her. The expression on her face was unreadable; it was impossible to tell whether she believed he had actually killed Carver.

"Things have happened fast to you, haven't they?" she said. She drew a tridim photo from a case and handed it to Harris. "This is your next victim. He goes under the name of Reynolds here. He's the second-in-command; first-in-command now, since Carver's dead."

Harris studied the photo. It showed the face of the bald-headed man who had inserted the subsonic beneath the skin of his thigh.

Tension mounted in him. He felt the faint *rasp rasp* in his stomach that was the agreed-upon code; Carver, waiting nearby, wanted to know if he were having any trouble.

Casually Harris kneaded his side, activating the transmitter. The signal he sent out told Carver that nothing had happened yet, that everything was all right.

HE HANDED the photo back to Beth.

"I'll take care of him," he said.

I press the neural nexus in the left hip and render them unconscious. Then I kill them with the disruptor and leave.

Very simple.

He looked at Beth and thought that in a few minutes she would lie dead, along with Coburn and the other two Medlins and these giants who claimed to be Earthmen. He tensed. His hand stole toward his hip.

Beth said, "It must have been a terrible nervous strain, killing him. You look very disturbed."

"You've overturned all the values of my life," Harris said glibly. "That can shake a man up."

"You didn't think I'd succeed!" Beth said triumphantly to Coburn. To Harris she explained, "Coburn didn't think you could be trusted."

"I can't," Harris said bluntly.

He activated the concealed subsonic.

The first waves of inaudible sound rippled out, ignoring false flesh and striking through to the Medlin core beneath. Protected by his three-foot shield, Harris nevertheless felt sick to the stomach, rocked by the reverberating sound-waves that

poured from the pellet embedded in his thigh.

Coburn was reaching for his weapon, but he never got to it. His arm drooped slackly; he slumped over. Beth dropped. The other two Medlins fell. Still the subsonic waves poured forth.

To his surprise Harris saw that the two giants still remained on their feet and semi-conscious, if groggy. *It must be because they're so big*, he thought. *It takes longer for the subsonic to knock them out.*

Wrynn was sagging now. His wife reeled under the impact of the noiseless waves and slipped to the floor, followed a moment later by her husband.

The office was silent.

Harris pressed his side again, signalling the *all clear* to the five Darrui outside. Six unconscious forms lay awkwardly on the floor.

He found the switch that opened the door, pulled it down, and peered out into the hall. Three figures lay outside, unconscious. A fourth was running toward them from the far end of the long hall, shouting, "What happened? What's going on?"

Harris stared at him. The Medlin ran into the forty-foot zone and recoiled visibly; he staggered forward a few steps and fell, joining his

comrades on the thick velvet carpet.

Ten of them, Harris thought.

He drew the disruptor.

It lay in his palm, small, deadly. The trigger was a thin strand of metal; he needed only to flip off the guard, press the trigger back, and watch the Medlins die. But his hand was shaking. He did not fire.

A silent voice said, *You could not be trusted after all. You were a traitor. But we had to let the test go at least this far, for the sake of our consciences.*

"Who said that?"

I did.

"Where are you? I don't see you."

In this room, came the reply. Put down the gun, Harris-Khiilom. No, don't try to signal your friends. Just let the gun fall.

As if it had been wrenched from his hand, the gun dropped from his fingers, bounced a few inches, and lay still.

Shut off the subsonic, came the quiet command. I find it unpleasant.

Obediently Harris deactivated the instrument. His mind was held in some strange stasis; he had no private volitional control.

"Who are you?"

A member of that super-

race whose existence you refused to accept.

Harris looked at Wrynn and his wife. Both were unconscious. "Wrynn?" he said. "How can your mind function if you're unconscious?"

CHAPTER VI

GENTLY Harris felt himself falling toward the floor. It was as if an intangible hand had yanked his legs out from under him and eased him down. He lay quiescent, eyes open, neither moving nor wanting to move.

The victims of the subsonic slowly returned to consciousness as the minutes passed.

Beth woke first. She stared at the unconscious form of Wrynn's wife and said, "You went to quite an extent to prove a point!"

You were in no danger, came the answer.

The others were awakening now, sitting up, rubbing their foreheads. Harris watched them. His head throbbed too, as if he had been stunned by the subsonic device himself.

"Suppose you had been knocked out by the subsonic too?" Beth said to the life within the giant woman. "He would have killed us."

The subsonic could not affect me.

Harris said, "That—embryo can think and act?" His voice

was a harsh whisper.

Beth nodded. "The next generation. It reaches sentience while still in the womb. By the time it's born it's fully aware."

"And I thought it was a hoax," Harris said dizzily. He felt dazed. The values of his life had been shattered in a moment, and it would not be easy to repair them with similar speed.

"No. No hoax. And we knew you'd try to trick us when we let you go. At least, Wrynn said you would. He's telepathic too, though he can only receive impressions. He can't transmit telepathically to others the way his son can."

"If you knew what I'd do, why did you release me?" Harris asked.

Beth said, "Call it a test. I hoped you might change your beliefs if we let you go. You didn't."

"No. I came here to kill you."

"We knew that the moment you stepped through the door. But the seed of rebellion was in you. We hoped you might be swayed. You failed us."

Harris bowed his head. The signal in his body rasped again, but he ignored it. *Let Carver sweat out there. This thing is bigger than anything Carver ever dreamed of.*

"Tell me," he said. "Don't

you know what will happen to Medlin—and Darruu as well—once there are enough of these beings?"

"Nothing will happen. Do you think they're petty power-seekers, intent on establishing a galactic dominion?" The girl laughed derisively. "That sort of thinking belongs to the obsolete non-telepathic species. Us. The lower animals. These new people have different goals."

"But they wouldn't have come into existence if you Medlins hadn't aided them!" Harris protested. "Obsolete? Of course. And you've done it!"

Beth smiled oddly. "At least we were capable of seeing the new race without envy. We helped them as much as we could because we knew they would prevail anyway, given time. Perhaps it would be another century, or another millenium. But our day is done, and so is the day of Darruu, and the day of the non-telepathic Earthmen."

"And our day too," Wrynn said mildly. "We are the intermediates—the links between the old species and the new one that is emerging."

Harris stared at his hands—the hands of an Earthman, with Darruui flesh within.

He thought: *All our striving is for nothing.*

A new race, a glorious race,

nurtured by the Medlins, brought into being on Earth. The galaxy waited for them. They were demigods.

He had regarded the Earthers as primitives, creatures with a mere few thousand years of history behind them, mere pale humanoids of no importance. But he was wrong. Long after Darruu had become a hollow world, these Earthers would roam the galaxies.

Looking up, he said, "I guess we made a mistake, we of Darruu. I was sent here to help sway the Earthers to the side of Darruu. But it's the other way around; it's Darruu that will have to swear loyalty to Earth, some day."

"Not soon," Wrynn said. "The true race is not yet out of childhood. Twenty years more must pass. And we have enemies on Earth."

"The old Earthmen," Coburn said. "How do you think they'll like being replaced? *They're* the real enemy. And that's why we're here. To help the mutants until they can stand fully alone. You Darrui are just nuisances getting in our way."

That would have been cause for anger, once. Harris merely shrugged. His whole mission had been without purpose.

But yet, a lingering doubt remained, a last suspicion. The silent voice of the unborn

superman said, *He still is not convinced.*

"I'm afraid he's right," Harris murmured. "I see, and I believe—and yet all my conditioning tells me that it's impossible. Medlins are hateful creatures; I *know* that, intuitively."

Beth smiled. "Would you like a guarantee of our good faith?"

"What do you mean?"

To the womb-bound godling she said, "Link us."

Before Harris had a chance to react a strange brightness flooded over him; he seemed to be floating far above his body. With a jolt he realized where he was.

He was looking into the mind of the Medlin who called herself Beth Baldwin. And he saw none of the hideous things he had expected to find in a Medlin mind.

He saw faith and honesty, and a devotion to the truth. He saw dogged courage. He saw many things that filled him with humility.

The linkage broke.

Beth said, "Now find the mind of his leader Carver, and link him to *that*."

"No," Harris protested. "Don't—"

It was too late.

He sensed the smell of Darruu wine, and the prickly texture of thuar spines, and then the superficial memories

parted to give him a moment's insight into the deeper mind of the Darruui who wore the name of John Carver.

It was a frightening pit of foul hatreds. Shivering, Harris staggered backward, realizing that the Earther had allowed him only a fraction of a second's entry into that mind.

He covered his face with his hands.

"Are—we all like that?" he asked. "Am I?"

"No. Not—deep down," Beth said. "You've got the outer layer of hatred that every Darruui has—and every Medlin. But your core is good. Carver is rotten. So are the other Darruui here."

"Our races have fought for centuries," Coburn said. "A mistake on both sides that has hardened into blood-hatred. The time has come to end it."

"How about those Darruui outside?"

"They must die," Beth said.

Harris was silent a moment. The five who waited for him were Servants of the Spirit, like himself; members of the highest caste of Darruui civilization, presumably the noblest of all creation's beings. To kill one was to set himself apart from Darruu for ever.

"My—conditioning lies deep," he said. "If I strike a blow against them, I could

never return to my native planet."

"Do you want to return?" Beth asked. "Your future lies here. With us."

Harris considered that. After a long moment he nodded. "Very well. Give me back the gun. I'll handle the five Darruui outside."

Coburn handed him the disruptor he had dropped. Harris grasped the butt of the weapon, smiled, and said, "I could kill some of you now, couldn't I? It would take at least a fraction of a second to stop me. I could pull the trigger once."

"You won't," Beth said.

He stared at her. "You're right."

HE RODE DOWN alone in the gravshaft and made his way down the street to the place where his five countrymen waited. It was very dark now, though the lambent glow of street-lights brightened the path.

The stars were out in force now, bedecking the sky. Up there somewhere was Darruu. Perhaps now was the time of the Mating of the Moons, he thought. Well, never mind; it did not matter now.

They were waiting for him. As he approached Carver said, "You took long enough. Well?"

Harris thought of the

squirming ropy thoughts that nestled in the other's brain like festering living snakes. He said, "All dead. Didn't you get my signal?"

"Sure we did. But we were getting tired of standing around out here."

"Sorry," Harris said.

He was thinking, these are Servants of the Spirit, men of Darruu. Men who think of Darruu's galactic dominion only, men who hate and kill and spy.

"How many were there?" Reynolds asked.

"Five," Harris said.

Carver looked disappointed. "Only five?"

Harris shrugged. "The place was empty. At least I got five, though."

He realized he was stalling, unwilling to do the thing he had come out here to do.

A silent voice said within him, *Will you betray us again? Or will you keep faith this time?*

Carver was saying something to him. He did not hear it. Carver said again, "I asked you—were there any important documents there?"

"No," Harris said.

A cold wind swept in from the river. Harris felt a sudden chill.

He said to himself, *I will keep faith.*

He stepped back, out of the three-foot zone, and activated

the subsonic generator in his hip.

"What—" Carver started to say, and fell. They all fell: Carver, Reynolds, Tompkins, McDermott, Patterson, slipped to the ground and lay in huddled heaps. Five Darrui wearing the skins of Earthmen. Five Servants of the Spirit.

He drew the disruptor.

It lay in his hand for a moment. Thoughtfully he released the safety guard and squeezed the trigger. A bolt of energy flicked out, bathing Carver. The man gave a convulsive quiver and was still.

Reynolds, Tompkins, McDermott, Patterson.

All dead.

Smiling oddly, Harris pocketed the disruptor again and started to walk away, walking uncertainly, as the nervous reaction started to swim through his body. He had killed five of his countrymen. He had come to Earth on a sacred mission and had turned worse than traitor, betraying not only Darruu but the entire future of the galaxy.

He had cast his lot with the Earthmen whose guise he wore, and with the smiling yellow-haired girl named Beth beneath whose full breasts beat a Medlin heart.

Well done, said the voice in his mind. *We were not deceived in you after all.*

Harris began to walk back toward the Medlin headquarters, slowly, measuredly, not looking back at the five corpses behind him. The police would be perplexed when they held autopsies on those five, and discovered the Darrui bodies beneath the Terran flesh.

He looked up at the stars. Somewhere out there was Darruu, he thought. Wrapped in its crimson mist, circled by its seven moons—

He remembered the Mating of the Moons as he had last seen it: the long-awaited, mind-stunning display of beauty in the skies. He knew he would never see it again.

He could never return to Darruu now.

He would stay here, on Earth, serving a godlike race in its uncertain infancy. Perhaps he could forget that be-

neath the skin of Major Abner Harris lay the body and mind of Aar Khiilom.

Forget Darruu. Forget the fragrance of the jasaar trees and the radiance of the moons. Earth has trees that smell as sweet, it has a glorious pale moon that hangs high in the night sky. Put homesickness away. Forget Darruu.

It would not be easy. He looked up again at the stars as he reached the entrance to the Medlin headquarters. Earth was the name of his planet now.

Earth.

He took a last look at the speckled sky covered with stars, and for the last time wondered which of the dots of brightness was Darruu. Darruu no longer mattered now.

Smiling, Aar Khiilom turned his face away from the stars.

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SOME OF OUR BEST FRIENDS ARE MONSTERS

Around the INFINITY offices, we're used to monsters—there are several of the extraterrestrial type in the place all the time. So it shouldn't be surprising that we also enjoy meeting the frightier, more Earthly but less natural type—in print if not in person. That's why we suggest that you might find a few pleasant shudders in a brand-new magazine called MONSTER PARADE, a large-sized bi-monthly loaded to the covers with ghouls, werewolves, vampires, witches, and similar entertainingly gruesome types. It's a real bargain in stories with an 18th century graveyard tradition and a strictly modern touch in the telling. Look for it at the newsstand near your favorite corner cemetery.

WORDS and MUSIC

***Lucky? No, Randall had worked hard
and long to obtain the soft berth he
held. Naturally, he'd missed a few things.***

By A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

CAPTAIN HALLEY, Master of the tramp starship *Epsilon Gruis*, settled down even more comfortably in the depths of his chair. He took a sip from the tall, frosted glass at his side, then drew on the long, locally manufactured cigar. He looked at Randall, the Trader, with envy.

He said, "You're lucky, Randall. Whenever I find one of you people in a set-up like this I feel like resigning from

my command and applying to the Commission for a Trader's berth."

Randall took a swallow from his own glass, smiled beatifically as the sweet, but not too sweet, aromatic, but not too aromatic, stimulant caressed his gullet on the way down to join the excellent dinner which the two men had already eaten.

"I've had to work for this," he said. "You know very well

what some of the other worlds are like, Captain. I've had to do my time on balls of mud and balls of barren rock and sand. I've had to live in pressurized huts and wear a space-suit every time that I wanted to take a stroll outside. I've had to do my trading with sly lizards and uppity octopi and communistic bumblebees. A world like this is the reward for long and faithful service."

The Captain finished his drink.

"I can see why this stuff fetches such big prices back on Earth," he said. "You've not forgotten the cask for the ship's stores, I hope."

"Of course not. Another glass, Captain?"

"Well, we're blasting off in a couple of hours...but it's a straight up and out job. The Mate can handle it."

"Good." Randall clapped his pudgy hands.

The woman who glided out onto the wide verandah was human rather than humanoid. She was tall, and slim, and walked silently and gracefully on narrow, elegant bare feet. Her single garment left her firm breasts and graceful legs exposed. Her blue hair matched her blue eyes, and both contrasted agreeably with her golden skin. Her generous mouth was scarlet

and her teeth were very white.

"Lord?" she murmured in a low contralto.

"Two more glasses of the wine," said Randall, "and see that it is well chilled."

"As you say, lord," she replied.

"Yes," said Captain Halley when she had gone, "you're sitting pretty. I know that it's none of my business, Randall, but are you and she...?"

"She's my housekeeper," said the Trader, leering slightly, "with all that it implies. Mind you—I've had better women. There's something...*withdrawn* about the women here. They're ornamental enough, but they aren't very warm in bed. You know what I mean?"

"Yes. But I suppose you can't have everything."

"I'm not complaining," said Randall. "After all, I rather prefer it that way."

The two men were silent as the girl brought in the fresh drinks. They looked out over the wide expanse of green sward to the spaceport where, gleaming in the dusk against the background of dark forest, stood the ship. The first of the flamebirds were out, slow moving iridescent luminosities sweeping gracefully across the dusky sky. To one side of the port was the village, its dim-glow-

ing lamps a pleasing contrast to the harsh glare of working lights around the interstellar tramp. From the village drifted the throbbing of drums, the sound of singing voices.

"It reminds me," said the Captain abruptly, "of the West Indies back on Earth. There's something of the calypso about that music."

"Yes," agreed Randall. He turned to the girl. "Nita, are they singing for us tonight?"

"Yes, lord. The ship from the stars has brought material for our songs as well as goods for your warehouses."

"All in the calypso tradition," said Halley. "You are lucky, Randall. Wine, women, and song."

"I've earned it," said Randall, with all of a small, fat man's smugness.

The beat of the drums was louder, the sound of singing. The procession could be seen making its way from the village to the Trader's house, the bobbing, soft-colored lanterns, the gleam of mellow light on pale flesh.

"I didn't recognize the song at first," said the Captain. "A familiar song in a foreign language always sounds different. Better, somehow." He began to sing himself in a rusty baritone.

*"Out beside the spaceport,
'neath the rockets' glare,
There I used to meet her,*

*and she'll be waiting
there,*

*There with her children at
her knee,*

*I own to one, but not to
three...*

*On Mars or Far Centaurus,
They blame it all on me..."*

HE CHUCKLED. "You hear spacemen's songs in the oddest places. I wonder what words they have to this one."

"What are the words that they are singing, Nita?" asked Randall.

"Just silly words, lord," she replied. "Like the words the Captain sang just now."

Halley scowled. Then. "I suppose that the words are silly," he admitted. "Don't you know what they are, Randall?"

"I," replied the Trader, almost boastfully, "am the galaxy's worst linguist. I look at it this way—if the natives of any world want to trade with us they'll very soon learn our language. Oh, I know that some Traders can rattle away in Valerian and Trug and even High and Low Merkish—but what good does it do 'em? My predecessor here—Cavendish, did you ever run across him?"

"No," said Halley. "This is my first time on Kiara. That's the worst of the Epsilon ships—you can never settle down to a steady run."

"Cavendish was a linguist," went on Randall. "But it didn't do him any good. He's on Traudor now. He'll be able to pass the time trying to make sense of the clicks and grunts the natives use for a language. At least it'll take his mind off the heat and the dust and the stinks."

The Kiarans were close now, ranged before the verandah in a wide arc. The drummers squatted on the grass, fingers stroking the taut parchment of their instruments. Tall and straight and beautiful the singers stood behind them. Above them, from the long staffs thrust into the turf, hung the glowing lanterns.

Softly, insistently, throbbed the drums. Softly, yet with a growing power, the voices filled the dusk. Halley knew nothing of music, and said so, but said also that he had never heard singing like it. Randall agreed with him.

He said, "The best part of it all, I think is that one doesn't know what they are singing about. For all I know they may be rhyming 'moon' and 'June' and committing all the other crimes of our Terran lyric writers. It's like... like... How shall I put it? It's like advertising in any of our big cities. You see the shifting shapes of colored fire against the night, and if you

couldn't read the words they would be lovely. But you can read the words—and to know that the letters spell out *Slumbo Sleeping Tablets* or *O'Dowd's Mountain Dew* puts a curse on them. See what I mean?"

The Captain said that he did. To the girl he said, "Nita, what are they singing about?"

"It is nothing, Captain," she said. "It is nothing. It is just a song."

"But they must be singing about *something*."

Her slight frown made her pointed face even more attractive.

"They are singing," she said, "about your ship. Of how you have come across all the long, empty miles to bring us cutlery and cloth, tinned meat and mirrors, in exchange for our worthless fruit juice."

"As I said," Halley told Randall, "it's like the calypso back on Earth."

"It seems that way," agreed the Trader.

"It would be amusing," said the Captain, "if one could get hold of a literal translation. Perhaps Nita..."

"I've tried, now and again. But she's always been as vague with me as she was, just now, with you."

"Have you ever considered," pursued Halley, "that good recordings might have con-

siderable marketable value back on Earth? I've recording equipment on board, my own property, that's hardly been used. For, say, three more casks of this wine..."

"You interest me," said Randall.

"Then," said the Captain, "if you had a literal translation of each song it would enhance the value of the recordings considerably."

"I've already told you," said Randall, "that I'm no linguist. I'll ask Nita..." He looked around. "She's gone, damn her." He raised his hands to clap.

"You can never be sure," said Halley, "that her translations are correct. Now, I have a machine on board. My Psionic Radio Officer made it. You are, of course, familiar with the principles of psionic radio?"

"Of course. Telepathy, as opposed to ordinary light speed radio, is instantaneous. Psionic radio operators are trained telepaths. Over long ranges, however, they need an amplifier—and the amplifier is, mainly, a tissue culture taken and grown from the brain of a dog."

"Near enough," said Halley. "Well, my P.R.O. is a bright sort of bloke—Fellow of the Rhine Institute and all the rest of it. What he was working on was a psionic transmit-

ter and receiver that would not require a telepath to operate it. It would be ideal equipment for the trading stations, for people like yourself..."

"It would be," said Randall.

"Anyhow," said the Captain, "that's what he was working on. (I wish I knew what the words of this song are—it has a lovely lilt to it!) Well, as I was saying, that was what he was working on. What he got was something different."

"What did he get?"

"A machine that is, so far as we can make out, an automatic translator. We have a few linguists in the crew. We've tried talking Russian to it and Spanish, and Valerian and Trug. The translation comes out almost instantaneously—like a very fast echo, but in a different language. Rather fascinating."

"But why should it translate into English?"

"I don't know. The dog that contributed the brain tissue must have been brought up either in England or America—that could be it. Anyhow, what I'm driving at is this—I'm sure that my P.R.O. can go on turning out these translating machines of his as long as the supply of brain tissue lasts, and that'll last as long as we can keep Fido growing."

"Fido?"

"What other name would you call an overgrown dog's brain in a glass jar?"

"What you're driving at, I suppose," said Randall, "is that your P.R.O. might be willing to sell me his translator to go with your recording equipment."

"That's it," said Halley.

FOR A WHILE the two men smoked and drank in silence, listening to the golden voices of the singers.

And they could, thought Randall, be golden voices, literally golden voices. The civilized planets had become blasé about *objets d'art* from the outworlds, and to command a sale such commodities had be *good*. This singing was good. It might not, he knew, be good to those who measured all music against the yardsticks of Bach and Beethoven, Schubert and Skaatzen, but it would be good to that vast majority that says that it knows what it likes (without knowing much else). Literal translations of each song would help sales. The Terran wordsmiths would be able to hammer them into singable shape, so that the songs would spread to all worlds where men and women like to sing over their beer, or on the march, or for sheer love making a joyful noise. Randall saw golden visions of

royalties and royalties and still more royalties....

"You think he'd sell?" he asked abruptly.

"Probably." A sharp buzzing came from the tiny transceiver on the Captain's wrist. "Excuse me a second, Randall. That'll be my Mate." Halley raised the little instrument to his lips. "Captain here."

The Chief Officer's voice was faint but clear. "All cargo loaded and stowed, sir. All hands aboard. We are securing for space."

"Good. Thank you, Bill. You know that wire recorder of mine? Will you get it packed and have it ready to put ashore? Detail a couple of cadets to bring it to the Trader's house. And find stowage for a few more casks—private venture."

"Can do, sir."

"Oh, and you might wake up Bryce from his usual trance and get him to talk to me."

"Will do, sir."

A fresh voice was audible. "P.R.O. here, sir."

"Mr. Bryce—you'll have tasted this local wine, no doubt."

"I have, sir."

"Would you like to make a couple of casks of it for yourself?"

"If the Captain will allow a private venture..."

"The Captain will. It's that

translator of yours. The Trader would like it."

"For two casks? Yes, sir."

"Put the Mate back on, will you?" There was a brief pause. "Listen, Bill—have the brats bring that fancy translator of the P.R.O.'s as well, will you? And be ready to load seven casks of p.v. wine into number eight storeroom."

"Three and two," said Randall, "make five."

"I know. But who said that you were paying only two casks for the translator?"

"I distinctly heard you tell your P.R.O.—"

"Maybe. But you didn't hear me tell him what my commission on the deal was to be."

"You're a hard man."

"I have to be."

"I shall want a test."

The Captain glanced at his watch. He said, "It'll have to be a fast one. I pride myself on always adhering to the advertised time of blasting off. Oh, and you'd better arrange for this choir of yours to do a spot of stevedoring—I don't mind my own personnel handling delicate instruments but I'm not going to have them trundling casks up the ramp."

Randall heaved himself out of his chair, walked to the verandah rail. He held up his short arms in a demand for silence.

"Gorloab!" he called.

The man who was beating the biggest of the drums got to his feet and walked forward, his golden, muscular body gleaming in the lamp-light.

"Lord?"

"Break out seven casks from the warehouse. Be ready to take them to the ship."

"Yes, Lord."

"Looks like your cadets on the way out now," said the Trader to Halley.

THE CAPTAIN got to his feet and joined Randall. The two men watched the bright headlights of the utility truck rapidly covering the distance between ship and house. Within a few minutes the little vehicle had drawn up alongside the wide steps. The cadets clambered down from the cab, went to the rear of the truck. Very carefully they lifted down the case containing the wire recorder and carried it up to the verandah. They returned for the other, larger case, handling it with even greater care.

Randall opened the first case and looked at the wire recorder.

"It seems to be in good condition," he grunted.

"It is," said Halley. Then, to his cadets: "Put the translator on the table. Careful, now."

"How does it work?" asked

Randall, looking curiously at the complexity of wiring, at the two tiny pumps, one of which was whirring busily at the jars of nutrient fluid, at the globe that held the slowly pulsating blob of yellow-grey matter.

"The main thing to remember is that it's alive," said the Captain. "You've enough spare nutrient fluid to last until the next ship drops in. If the pump should stop, you switch over to the other one. It will be as well to switch over every twenty-four hours, as a matter of routine, anyhow."

"But how does it work?"

"The sound," said Halley, poking a trumpet with his finger, "goes in there." He lifted a pair of earphones. "And it comes out here."

"I want a test."

"Then get that girl of yours in."

"All right." Randall clapped his hands. Nita swayed silently onto the verandah. The two cadets stared at her in open-mouthed admiration.

"Put on the earphones, Randall," ordered Halley. "All right. Now you, my dear, say into this trumpet, in your own language... Well, say, 'I wish *bon voyage* to *Epsilon Gruis* and all her crew'."

"As you wish, Captain," said the girl. Then a succession of liquid syllables

dropped from her tongue.

Randall chuckled.

"Well," he said, "I suppose I got a literal translation of what she said. One has to make allowances for the *mores* of different races, of course...."

"What did she say?"

"'I hope,'" repeated Randall, "'that the old scow returns with a load of good things for us'."

"What *did* you say?" asked Halley, addressing the girl.

She returned his gaze steadily, her head held high. She said, "You have heard, Captain."

"Your manners," said Halley coldly, "could stand improvement."

"Her manners," said Randall, "are *my* concern, not yours."

"If that's the way you want it," snapped the spaceman. "Well, are you taking the goods?"

"Yes." Then, to the girl, "Tell Gorloab to load the additional cargo into the ship."

"I must be going," said Halley. "Thanks for the evening's entertainment, Randall. I may run into you again—if not here, then on some other planet."

"It'll be either here, or back on Earth," said the Trader. "I like it here—but if I am able to do anything interesting and profitable with the gear

you sold me... Well, who knows?"

The two men shook hands. Captain Halley followed his cadets into the waiting truck. Randall, sitting at ease on his verandah, watched the vehicle make its way to the ship. He saw, after a while, the bright red light winking from the star tramp's sharp bow, heard the wailing of her siren. He knew that Gorloab would have seen to it that none of his people remained in the danger area. He put on his dark spectacles just as the column of fire started to mount under *Epsilon Gruis'* stern, saw her rise, slowly at first and then faster, until all that remained of her was a tall pillar of fading incandescence against the night, pointing to the stars dissipated slowly by the high winds.

He thought, I shall be sorry to leave this planet. But when I have made my fortune I shall be able to live here some of the time.

He got up and went into the bedroom, where Nita was waiting for him.

HE WAS a rather impatient man, was Randall. He was, at the same time, conscientious. There were tallies to be made, entries to be made in his ledgers, goods to be bartered with the natives who always came in to the port

after the visit of a starship, the flare of rockets in the night sky being all the notification they needed.

So, throughout the day, Randall worked hard, anxious to get back to the equipment waiting for him on his verandah. He was furious when a fresh contingent of Kiarans from one of the outlying villages arrived within a few minutes of sunset, the official time for finishing the day's business. But he dealt with them, although with a bad grace, taking from them the bags of dried *carranberries* that were almost as valuable as the wine, giving them in exchange knives and mirrors and bolts of cloth and electric torches.

It was dark when he was back in his house.

"Bring me a drink," he snapped to Nita, "then tell Gorloab to arrange a singing party."

"But, lord, your dinner... And there was a singing party last night, in honor of the Star Captain."

"Dinner can wait. And tell Gorloab that I want the singing party *now*."

"As you say, Lord," she replied submissively.

When she was gone he fussed around with the apparatus. He switched on the recorder, said, "Testing... One... Two... Three..." He

played it back. He went to the translator, looked with something approaching awe at the pulsating tissue of the brain of the thing. It was strange, he thought, how great a part dogs had played in the conquest of space—the first living beings in satellite rockets, the first living beings to circumnavigate Earth's moon and now, thanks to the psychic powers long suspected, the means whereby the ships in space and the major civilized planets and colonies could talk to each other over the light-years with no lag.

He looked up from the weird machine to see the procession of glowing lanterns making its slow way from the village to his house. He stood erect and walked to the edge of the verandah. He saw, at last, Gorloab heading the ragged column, holding his drum before him. Nita walked at his side.

Slowly, with a certain sullenness, the party spread out into the usual wide arc—drummers squatting on the grass, singers standing behind them. Sullenly, the drums began their rhythmic throbbing. Softly, but with mounting volume, the singing started. Randall sat there with the earphones on his head, listening to the words, the dreadful, humiliating words, that issued in a sing-song

voice from the translator.

They think they are gods, he heard, the men from the stars. They think they are gods, but they are pigs, and less than pigs. We humor them—for how else should we get the things that it is too much trouble for us to make ourselves? The Trader is the Pig of Pigs. Our women sleep with him so that they may learn his secrets. They are not defiled, because he cannot touch their inner selves. To them he is only a small nuisance, less than a buzzing mosquito in the night....

There followed, then a description of Terran techniques of love-making that brought a dull flush to Randall's plump cheeks—a flush that rapidly faded to ashen grey.

He jumped to his feet, tearing the earphones from his head as he did so.

"Stop!" he bellowed. "Stop!"

"Lord," said Gorloab, gravely courteous, "you said that you wanted a singing party."

"I did," said Randall. "I *did*. Nita, come here!"

She climbed the steps to the verandah, stood before him.

"You will answer my questions truthfully," he said in a thick voice.

"Have I ever done otherwise?" she said.

"I don't know," he replied.

"I wish that I did.... Tell me this. Do you hate me?"

"No."

"Do your people hate me?"

"No."

"Do they...despise me?"

"Yes."

"I...see. Now, tonight's singing party. It was one of the songs they sang last night. It was one of the songs they are always singing. Tell me—were tonight's words special words?"

"No. They are the words we always sing."

Painfully he pressed on.

"These animals that you say we are... What are they?"

"*Grungas*," she replied.

Randall winced. The *grunga* was not unlike the Terran pig, but greedier, dirtier.

"And the insect that I am like?"

"A *pzissitt*."

And the *pzissitt* hasn't even a painful bite or sting, thought Randall.

"That will do," he said.

"You can go. You needn't come back."

He pushed the translator off the table, stamped hard upon the spherical transparency containing the brain until it shattered. It had told him enough. It had told him why he, notorious for his inability to learn another language than his own, had been posted to this planet. It had told him that he must live alone until the next ship dropped through the clear sky, to the little spaceport, until the Commission got his message demanding immediate relief. It had told him that if the music is good it is unwise to worry about the words.

It had told him too much.

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SOLACON!

The Solacon—otherwise the Sixteenth World Science Fiction Convention (combined with the 11th Annual Westercon)—will be held at the Hotel Alexandria in Los Angeles, California, over the Labor Day week-end, and everybody who is anybody in science fiction will be there. Richard Matheson has been selected as the guest of honor, and the program is shaping up nicely. There's still time to join the World Science Fiction Society, Inc., by sending a dollar to Treasurer Rick Sneary, 2962 Santa Ana Street, South Gate, California. You'll never be sorry!

Between the DARK and the DAYLIGHT

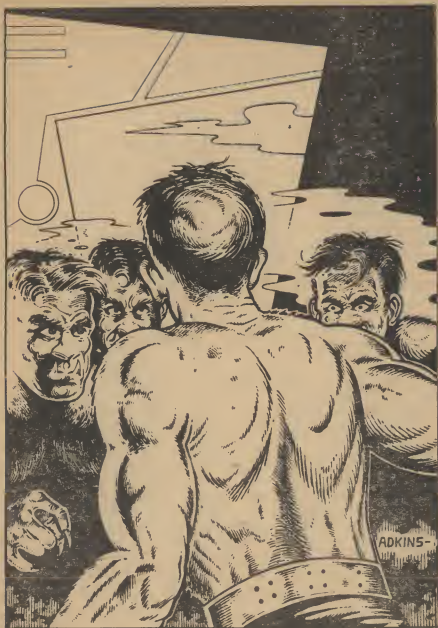
By DAVID C. HODGKINS

*All they wanted was to see their own
children. How could Brendan refuse?*

A CURVED SECTION of the dome, twenty feet thick with the stubs of reinforcing rod rusty and protruding through the damp-marked concrete, formed the ceiling and back wall of Brendan's office. There was a constant drip of seepage and condensation. Near the mildew-

spotted floor, a thin white mist drifted in torn swirls while the heating coils buried in the concrete fought back against the cold. There was one lamp in the windowless dark, a glowing red coil on Brendan's desk, well below the eye level of the half-dozen men in the room. The

Illustrated by DAN ADKINS



heavy office door was swung shut, the locking bars pushed home. If it had not been, there would have been some additional light from the coils in the corridor ceiling, outside the office. Brendan would have had to face into it, and the men in front of him would have been looming shadows to him.

But the door was shut, as Brendan insisted it must be, as all doors to every room and every twenty-foot length of corridor were always shut as much of the time as possible—at Brendan's insistence—as though the dome were a sinking ship.

Conducted by the substance of the dome, there was a constant *chip, chip, chip* coming from somewhere, together with a heartless gnawing sound that filled everyone's head as though they were all biting on sandpaper.

Brendan growled from behind his desk: "I'm in charge."

The five men on the opposite side of the desk had tacitly chosen Falconer for their spokesman. He said: "But we've all got something to say about it, Brendan. You're in charge, but nothing gives you the power to be an autocrat."

"No?"

"Nothing. The Expedition Charter, in fact, refers to a Board of Officers—"

"The Expedition Charter was written four hundred years ago, a thousand light-years away. The men who drew it up are dust. The men who signed it are dust."

"You're in the direct line of descent from the first Captain."

"Then you're recognizing me as a hereditary monarch, Falconer. I don't see the basis of your complaint."

Falconer—lean as a whip from the waist down, naked, thick-torsoed, covered with crisp, heavy fur—set his clawed feet a little apart and thrust out his heavy under-jaw, clearing his sharp canine tusks away from his flat lips. He lifted his enormous forearms out from his sides and curved his fingers. "Don't pare cheese with us, Brendan. The rest of the dome might be willing to let it go, as long as things're so near completion. But not us. We won't stand for it." The men with him were suddenly a tense pack, waiting, ready.

Brendan stood up, a member of Falconer's generation, no more evolved than any of them. But he was taller than Falconer or any other man in the room. He was bigger, his cruelly-shaped jaw broader, his tusks sharper, his forearm muscles out of all proportion to the length of the bone, like clubs. His eyes burned out

from under his shaggy brows, lambent with the captive glow of the lighting coil, set far back under the protection of heavy bone. The slitted nostrils of his flat nose were suddenly flared wide.

"You don't dare," he rumbled. His feet scraped on the floor. "I'll disembowel the first man to reach me." He lashed out and sent the massive bronze desk lurching aside, clearing the way between himself and Falconer's party. And he waited, while the other men sent sidelong glances at Falconer and Falconer's eyes slowly fell. Then Brendan grunted. "This is why I'm in charge. Charters and successions don't mean a thing after four hundred years. Not if a good man goes against them. You'll keep on taking my orders."

"What kind of paranoiac's world do you live in?" Falconer said bitterly. "Imposing your will on all of us. Doing everything your way and no other. We're not saying your methods are absolutely going to wreck the project, but—"

"What?"

"We've all got a stake in this. We've all got children in the nursery, the same way you do."

"I don't favor my son over any of the others. Get that idea out of your head."

"How do we know? Do we

have anything to do with the nursery? Are we allowed inside?"

"I'm this generation's biotechnician and pedagogical specialist. That's the Captain's particular job. That's the way it's been since the crash—by the same tradition you were quoting—and that's the way it has to be. This is a delicate business. One amateur meddling in it can destroy everything we're doing and everything that was done in the past. And we'll never have another chance."

"All right. But where's the harm in looking in on them? What's your point in not letting us at the cameras?"

"They're being overhauled. We're going to need to have them in perfect working order tomorrow, when we open the nursery gates to the outside. That's when it'll be important to look in on the children and make sure everything's all right."

"And meanwhile only you can get into the nursery and see them."

"That's my job."

"Now, listen, Brendan, we all went through the nursery, too. And your father had the same job you do. We weren't sealed off from everybody but him. We saw other people. You know that just as well as we do."

Brendan snorted. "There's

no parallel. We weren't the end product. We were just one more link in the chain, and we had to be taught all about the dome, because the hundred-odd of us were going to constitute its next population. We had to be taught about the air control system, the food distribution, the power plant—and the things it takes to keep this place functioning as well as it can. We had to each learn our job from the specialist who had it before us.

"But the next generation isn't going to need that. That's obvious. This is what we've all been working for. To free them. Ten generations ago, the first of us set out to free them.

"And that's what I'm going to do, Falconer. That's my job, and nobody here could to it, but me, in my way."

"They're our children too!"

"All right, then, be proud of them. Tomorrow they go outside, and there'll be men out on the face of this world at last. Your flesh, your blood, and they'll take this world away from the storms and the animals. That's what we've spent all this time for. That's what generations of us have huddled in here for, hanging on for this day. What more do you want?"

"Some of the kids are going to die," one of the other men

growled. "No matter how well they're equipped to handle things outside, no matter how much has been done to get them ready. We don't expect miracles from you, Brendan. But we want to make sure you've done the best possible. We can't just twiddle our thumbs."

"You want work to do? There's plenty. Shut up and listen to what's going on outside."

THE GNAWING filled their heads. Brendan grinned coldly. And the chipping sound, which had slowed a little, began a rapid pace again.

"They just changed shifts," Brendan said. "One of them got tired and a fresh one took over."

"They'll never get through to us in the time they've got left," Falconer said.

"No?" Brendan turned on him in rage. "How do you know? Maybe they've stopped using flint. Maybe they've got hold of something like diamonds. What about the ones that just use their teeth? Maybe they're breeding for tusks that concrete won't wear down. Think we've got a patent on that idea? Think because we do it in a semi-automatic nursery, blind evolution can't do it out in that wet hell outside?"

Lusic—the oldest one of

them there, with sparse fur and lighter jaws, with a round skull that lacked both a sagittal crest and a bone shelf over the eyes—spoke for the first time.

"None of those things seem likely," he said in a voice muffled by the air filter his generation had to wear in this generation's ecology. "They are possibilities, of course, but only that. These are not purposeful intelligences like ourselves. These are only immensely powerful animals—brilliant, for animals, in a world lacking a higher race to cow them—but they do not lay plans. No, Brendan, I don't think your attempt to distract us has much logic in it. The children will be out, and will have destroyed them, before there can be any real danger to the dome's integrity. I can understand your desire to keep us busy, because we are all tense as our efforts approach a climax. But I do think your policy is wrong. I think we should long ago have been permitted a share in supervising the nursery. I think your attempt to retain dictatorial powers is an unhealthy sign. I think you're afraid of no longer being the most powerful human being in our society. Whether you know it or not, I think that's what behind your attitude. And I think something ought

to be done about it, even now."

"*Distract!*" Brendan's roar made them all retreat. He marched slowly toward Lusic, and the other man began to back away. "When I need advice from a sophist like you, that'll be the time when we all need distraction!" He stopped when Lusic was pressed against the wall, and he pointed at the wall.

"There is nothing in this world that loves us. There is nothing in this world that can even tolerate us. Generations of us have lived in this stone trap because not one of us—not even I—could live in the ecology of this planet. It was never made for men. Men could not have evolved on it. It would have killed them when they crawled from the sea, killed them when they tried to breathe its atmosphere, killed them when they tried to walk on its surface, and when they tried to take a share of food away from the animals that *could* evolve here. We are a blot and an abomination upon it. We are weak, loathsome grubs on its iron face. And the animals know us for what we are. They may even guess what we have spent generations in becoming, but it doesn't matter whether they do or not—they hate us, and they won't stop trying to kill us.

"When the expedition crashed here, they were met by storms and savagery. They had guns and their kind of air regenerators and a steel hull for shelter, and still almost all of them died. But if they had been met by what crowds around this dome today, they would never have lived at all, or begun this place.

"You're right, Lusic—there are only animals out there. Animals that hate us so much, some of them have learned to hold stones in their paws and use them for tools. They hate us so much they chip, chip, chip away at the dome all day, and gnaw at it, and howl in the night for us to come out, because they hate us so.

"We only *hope* they won't break through. We can only hope the children will drive them away in time. We don't know. But you'd rather be comfortable in your hope. You'd rather come in here and quibble at my methods. But I'm not your kind. Because if I don't know, I don't hope. I act. And because I act, and you don't, and because I'm in charge, you'll do what I tell you."

He went back to his desk and shoved it back to its place. "That's all. I've heard your complaint, and rejected it. Get back to work re-inforcing the dome walls. I want that done."

They looked at him, and at each other. He could see the indecision on their faces. He ignored it, and after a moment they decided for retreat. They could have killed him, acting together, and they could have acted together against any other man in the dome. But not against him. They began going out.

Lusic was the last through the door. As he reached to pull it shut, he said. "We may kill you if we can get enough help."

Brendan looked at his watch and said quietly: "Lusic—it's the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, on Chaim Weber's calendar. Stop off at his place and tell him it's sunset, will you?"

He waited until Lusic, finally nodded, and then ignored him again until the man was gone.

WHEN his office door was locked, he went to the television screen buried in the wall behind him, switched it on, and looked out at the world outside.

Rain—rain at a temperature of 1° Centigrade—blurred the camera lenses, sluicing over them, blown up through the protective baffles, giving him not much more than glutinous light and shadow to see. But Brendan knew what was out there, as surely as a caged

wolf knows the face of his keeper. Near the top of the screen was a lichinous gray-green mass, looming through the bleakness, that he knew for a line of beaten, slumped mountains. Between the mountains and the dome was a plain, running with water, sodden with the runoff from the spineless hills, and in the water, the animals. They were the color of rocks at the bottom of an ocean—great, mud-plastered masses, wallowing toward each other in combat or in passion, rolling, lurching, their features gross, heavy, licking out a sudden paw with unbelievable speed, as though giant hippopotami, swollen beyond all seeming ability to move, still somehow had managed to endow themselves with the reflexes of cats. They crowded the plain, a carpet of obscenity, and for all they fed on each other, and mated, and sometimes slept with their unblinking eyes open and swiveling, they all faced toward the dome and never stopped throwing themselves against its flanks, there to hang scrabbling at the curve of the concrete, or doing more purposeful things.

Brendan looked out at them with his chest rising in deep swells. "I'd like to get out among you," he growled. "You'd kill me, but I'd like to

get out among you." He took a long breath.

He triggered one of the dome's old batteries, and watched the shells howl into the heaving plain. Red fire flared, and the earth trembled, erupting. Wherever the shells struck, the animals were hurled aside...to lie stunned, to shake themselves with the shock of the explosions, and to stagger to their feet again.

"You wait," Brendan hissed, stopping the useless fire. "You wait 'til my Donel gets at you. You wait."

He shut the screen off, and crossed his office toward a door set into the bulkhead at his right. Behind it were the nursery controls, and, beyond those, behind yet another door which he did not touch, was the quarter-portion of the dome that housed the children, sealed off, more massively walled than any other part, and, in the center of its share of the dome surface, pierced by the only full-sized gateway to the world. It was an autonomous shelter-within-a-shelter, and even its interior walls were fantastically thick in case the dome itself were broken.

The controls covered one wall of their cubicle. He ignored the shrouded camera screens and the locked switch that would activate the gate. He passed on to the monitor-

ing instruments, and read off the temperature and pressure, the percentages of the atmospheric components, and all the other things that had to be maintained at levels lethal to him so that the children could be comfortable. He put the old headphones awkwardly to his ears and listened to the sounds he heard in the nursery.

He opened one of the traps in the dome wall, and almost instantly there was an animal in it. He closed the outer end of the trap, opened the access into the nursery, and let the animal in. Then, for a few more moments, he listened to the children as they killed and ate it.

LATER, as he made his way down the corridor, going home for the night, he passed Chaim Weber's doorway. He stopped and listened, and coming through the foot-thick steel and the concrete wall, he heard the Channukah prayer:

"Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheyinu Melech Haolam, shehichiyanu vikiyimanu, vihigianu lazman hazeh..."

"Blessed be The Lord," Brendan repeated softly to himself, "Our God, Lord of the Universe. Who has given us life, and is our strength, and has brought us this day."

He stopped and whispered,

"this day," again, and went on.

HIS WIFE was waiting for him, just inside the door, and he grunted a greeting to her while he carefully worked the bolts. She said nothing until he had turned around again, and he looked at her inquiringly.

"Sally?"

"You did it again," she said.

He nodded without special expression. "I did."

"Falconer's got the whole dome buzzing against you."

"All right."

She sighed angrily. "Did you have to threaten Lusic? He's only the representative of the previous generation. The one group inside the dome detached enough to be persuaded to back you up."

"One, I didn't threaten him. If he felt that way, it was only because he knew he was pushing me into a corner where I might turn dangerous. Two, anything he represents can't be worth much, if he can accuse me of bringing in a red herring and then can back down when I bring that selfsame herring back in a louder tone of voice. Three, it doesn't matter if anybody supports me. I'm in charge."

She set her mouth in a disgusted line. "You don't think much of yourself, do you?"

Brendan crossed the room. He sat down on the edge of

the stone block that fitted into the join of floor and wall, and was his bed. Sitting that way, bent forward, with his shoulders against the curve of the overhead, he looked as though he might be trying to help hold up the dome. "We've been married a long time, Sally. That can't be a fresh discovery you're making."

"It isn't."

"All right."

"You don't even care what I think of you, do you?"

"I care. I can't afford to pay any attention."

"You don't care. You don't care for one living soul besides yourself, and the only voice you'll listen to is that power-chant in your head. You married me because I was good breeding stock. You married me because, if you can't lead us outside, at least your son will be the biggest and best of his generation."

"Funny," Brendan said. "Lusic thinks I've been motivated by a fear of losing my pre-eminence. I wonder if your positions can be reconciled. And do you realize you're admitting I'm exactly what I say I am?"

She spat: "I hate you. I really do. I hope they pull you down before the nursery gate opens to the outside."

"If they pull me down, that'll be a sure bet. I changed

over all the controls, several years ago. I'm the only man in this dome who can possibly work them."

"You *what*!"

"You heard me."

"They'll kill you when I tell them."

"You can think better than that, Sally. You're just saying something for the sake of making a belligerent noise. They don't dare kill me, and they'd be taking a very long chance in torturing me to a point where I'd tell them how the controls work. Longer than long, because there'd be no logic in my telling them and so passing my own death sentence. But I expected you to say something like that, because people do, when they're angry. That's why I never get angry. I've got a purpose in life. I'm going to see it attained. So you're not going to catch me in any mistakes."

"You're a monster."

"So I am. So are we all. Monsters with a purpose. And I'm the best monster of us all."

"They'll kill you the moment after you open that gate."

"No," he said slowly, "I don't think so. All the tension will be over then, and the kids will be doing their job."

"I'll kill you. I promise."

"I don't think you mean that. I think you're in love

with me."

"You think I love you?"

"Yes, I do."

She looked at him uncertainly. "Why do I?"

"I don't know. Love takes odd forms, under pressure. But it's still love. Though, of course, I don't know anything about it."

"You bastard, I hate you more than any man alive."

"You do."

"I—no...!" She began to cry. "Why do you have to be like this? Why can't you be what I want—what you can be?"

"I can't. Even though you love me." He sat in his dark corner, and his eyes brooded at her.

"And what do you feel?"

"I love you," he said. "What does that change?"

"Nothing," she said bitterly. "Absolutely nothing."

"All right, then."

She turned away in unbearable frustration, and her eyes rested on the dinner table, where the animal haunch waited. "Eat your supper."

He got up, washed at the sink, went over to the table and broke open the joint on the roast. He gave her half, and they began to eat.

"Do you know about the slaughtering detail?" he asked her.

"What about it?"

"Do you know that two

days ago, one of the animals deliberately came into the trap in the dome? That it had help?"

"How?"

"Another animal purposely stayed in the doorway, to jam it. I think they thought that if they did that, the killing block couldn't fall. I think they watched outside—perhaps for months—and thought it out. And it might have worked, but the killing block was built to fall regardless, and it killed them both. The slaughtering detail dragged the other one in through the doorway before any more could reach them. But suppose there'd been a third one, waiting directly outside? They'd have killed four men. And suppose, next time, they try to wedge the block? And then chip through the sides of the trap, which are only a few feet thick? Or suppose they invent tools with handles, for leverage, and begin cutting through in earnest?"

"The children will be out there before that happens."

Brendan nodded. "Yes. But we're running it narrow. Very narrow. This place would never hold up through another generation."

"What difference does it make? We've beaten them. Generation by generation, we've changed to meet them, while all they've done is learn

a little. We've bred back, and mutated, and trained. We've got a science of genetics, we've got controlled radioactivity, gene selection, chromosome manipulation—all they've got is hate."

"Yes. And listen to it."

Grinding through the dome, the gnaw and chip came to them clearly.

They began to eat again, after one long moment.

Then she asked: "Is Donel all right?"

He looked up sharply. They had had this out a long time ago. "He's all right as far as I know." He was responsible for all of the children in the nursery, not just one in particular. He could not afford to get into the habit of discussing one any more than another. He could not afford to get into the habit of discussing any of them at all.

"You don't care about *him*, either, do you?" she said. "Or have you got some complicated excuse for that, too?"

He shook his head. "It's not complicated." He listened to the sound coming through the dome.

She looked at him with tears brimming in her eyes. He thought for an instant of the tragedy inherent in the fact that they all of them knew how ugly they were—and that the tragedy did not exist, because somehow love

did *not* know—and he was full of this thought when she said, like someone dying suddenly. "Why? Why, Sean?"

"Why?" She'd got a little way past his guard. "Because I'm the Captain, and because I'm the best, and there's no escaping the duty of being that. Because some things plainly must be done—not because there is anything sacred in plans made by people who are past, and gone, but because there is no other reason why we should have been born with the intelligence to discipline our emotions."

"How cut-and-dried you make it sound!"

"I told you it wasn't complicated. Only difficult."

THE COMMON ROOMS were in the center of the dome, full of relics: lighting systems designed for eyes different from theirs; ventilation ducts capped over, uncapped again, modified; furniture re-built times over; stuff that had once been stout enough to stand the wear of human use—too fragile to trust, now, against the unconscious brush of a hurried hip or the kick of a stumbling foot; doorways too narrow, aisles too cramped in the auditorium; everything not quite right.

Brendan called them there in the morning, and every man

and woman in the dome came into the auditorium. They growled and talked restlessly—Falconer and Lusic and the rest were moving purposefully among them—and when Brendan came out on the stage, they rumbled in the red-lit gloom, the condensation mist swirling up about them. Brendan waited, his arms folded, until they were all there.

"Sit down," he said. He looked across the room, and saw Falconer and the others watching him carefully, gauging their moment. "Fools," Brendan muttered to himself. "If you were going to challenge me at all, you should have done it long ago." But they had let him cow them too long—they remembered how, as children, they had all been beaten by him—how he could rise to his feet with six or seven of them clinging to his back and arms, to pluck them off and throw them away from him. And how, for all their clevernesses, they had never out-thought him. They had promised themselves this day—perhaps years ago, even then, they had planned his ripping-apart—but they had not dared to interfere with him until the dome's work was done. In spite of hate, and envy, and the fear that turns to murder. They knew who their best man was, and

Brendan could see that most of them still had that well in mind. He searched the faces of the people, and where Falconer should have been able to put pure rage, he saw caution lurking with it, like a divided counsel.

He was not surprised. He had expected that—if there had been no hesitation in any man he looked at, it would have been for the first time in his life. But he had never pressed them as hard as he meant to do this morning. He would need every bit of a cautious thought, every slow response that lived among these people, or everything would go smash, and he with it.

He turned his head fleetingly, and even that, he knew, was dangerous. But he had to see if Sally was still there, poised to one side of the stage, looking at him blankly. He turned back to the crowd.

"All right. Today's the day. The kids're going out as soon as I'm through here."

Sally had told him this morning not to call them together—to just go and do it. But they would have been out in the corridors, waiting. He would have had to brush by them. One touch—one contact of flesh to flesh, and one of them might have tried to prove the mortality he found in Sean Brendan.

"I want you in your homes. I want your doors shut. I want the corridor compartments closed tight." He looked at them, and in spite of the death he saw rising among them like a tide, he could not let it go at that. "I want you to do that," he said in a softer voice than any of them had ever heard from him. "Please."

It was the hint of weakness they needed. He knew that when he gave it to them.

"Sean!" Sally cried.

And the auditorium reverberated to the formless roar that drowned her voice with its cough. They came toward him with their hands high, baying, and Sally clapped her hands to her ears.

BRENDAN STOOD, wiped his hand over his eyes, turned, and jumped. He was across the stage in two springs, his toenails gashing the floor, and he spun Sally around with a hand that held its iron clutch on her arm. He swept a row of seats into the feet of the closest ones, and pushed Sally through the side door to the main corridor. He snatched up the welding gun he had left there, and slashed across door and frame with it, but they were barely started in their run toward his office before he heard the hasty weld snap

open and the corridor boom with the sound of the rebounding door. Claws clicked and scratched on the floor behind him, and bodies thudded from the far wall, flung by momentum and the weight of the pack behind them. There would be trampled corpses in the auditorium, he knew, in the path between the door and the mob's main body.

Sally tugged at the locked door to the next section of corridor. Brendan turned and played the welder's flame in the distorted faces nearest him. Sally got the door open, and he threw her beyond it. They forced it shut again behind them, and this time his weld was more careful but that was broken, too, before they were through the next compartment, and now there would be people in the parallel corridors, racing to cut them off—racing, and howling. The animals outside must be hearing it...must be wondering...

He turned the two of them into a side corridor, and did not stop to use the welder. The mob might bypass an open door...and they would need to be able to get to their homes...

They were running along the dome's inside curve, now, in a section where the dome should have been braced—it hadn't been done—and he

cursed Falconer for a spiteful ass while their feet scattered the slimy puddles and they tripped over the concrete forms that had been thrown down carelessly.

"All right," Brendan growled to himself and to Falconer, "all right, you'll think about that when the time comes."

They reached the corridor section that fronted on his office, and there were teeth and claws to meet them. Brendan hewed through the knot of people, and now it was too late to worry whether he killed them or not. Sally was running blood down her shoulder and back, and his own cheek had been ripped back by a throat-slash that missed. He swallowed gulps of his own blood, and spat it out as he worked toward his door, and with murder and mutilation he cleared the way for himself and the mother of his boy, until he had her safe inside, and the edge of the door sealed all around. Then he could stop, and see the terrible wound in Sally's side, and realize the bones of his leg were dripping and jagged as they thrust out through the flesh.

"Didn't I tell you?" he reproached her as he went to his knees beside her where she lay on the floor. "I told you to go straight here, in-

stead of to the auditorium." He pressed his hands to her side, and sobbed at the thick well of her blood over his gnarled fingers with the tufts of sopping fur caught in their claws. "Damn you for loving me!"

She twitched her lips in a rueful smile, and shook her head slightly. "Go let Donel out," she whispered.

They were hammering on the office door. And there were cutting torches available, just as much as welders. He turned and made his way to the control cubicle, half-dragging himself. He pulled the lever that would open the gates, once the gate motors were started, and, pulling aside the panels on cabinets that should have had nothing to do with it, he went through the complicated series of switchings that diverted power from the dome pile into those motors.

The plain's mud had piled against the base of the gate, and the hinges were old. The motors strained to push it aside, and the dome thrummed with their effort. The lighting coils dimmed, and outside his office door, Brendan could hear a great sigh. He pulled the listening earphones to his skull, and heard the children shout. Then he smiled with his ruined mouth, and pulled himself back into his office,

to the outside viewscreen, and turned it on. He got Sally and propped her up. "Look," he mumbled. "Look at our son."

There was blurred combat on the plain, and death on that morning, and no pity for the animals. He watched, and it was quicker than he could ever have imagined.

"Which one is Donel?" Sally whispered.

"I don't know," he said. "Not since the children almost killed me when they were four; you should have heard Donel shouting when he tore my respirator away by accident—he was playing with me, Sally—and saw me flop like a fish for air I could breathe, and saw my blood when another one touched

my throat. I got away from them that time, but I never dared go back in after they searched out the camera lenses and smashed them. They *knew*, then—they knew we were in here, and they knew we didn't belong on their world."

And Falconer's kind would have gassed them, or simply re-mixed their air...they would have, after a while, no matter what...I know how many times I almost did...

There was a new sound echoing through the dome. "Now they don't need us to let them out, anymore." There was a quick, sharp, deep hammering from outside—mechanical, purposeful, tireless. "That...that may be Donel now."

∞ ∞ ∞ /

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the man who

Chances are you'll sympathize deeply with Henry Westing, who merely wanted to go on living his own life in his own man-

ALL HIS LIFE people had been trying to get Henry Westing to sign up. They were all signing up themselves and they wanted everybody else to sign up too.

In college it had been the fraternities. Mr. Westing hadn't tried to join one.

"But you've got to belong to something," they said. "Everybody does."

"I don't."

"Sure you do. You're just being rebellious."

"Perhaps."

"Everybody's got to belong. Ask any psychologist."

"Perhaps. I wouldn't know."

After college it had been work. He had lost three jobs

in a row for the same reason.

"We're sorry, Westing, but you just don't seem to fit in with the group."

"Don't I do my work well?"

"Yes, but you don't seem to belong. We like men who consider themselves part of The Company, not just people who work here."

In the end he had found a job in a large travel agency in the center of Philadelphia. This is a business in which everyone at least pretends to be cynical about his work, so Westing was able to keep his position no matter how he acted. Of course by this time he had learned to keep his mouth shut.

All around him he watched

wouldn't sign up

*ner. But under the same circumstances,
how would you go about doing it?*

By THOMAS E. PURDOM

people signing up. "You've got to have something bigger than yourself," they said. "You've got to belong."

He watched them do it and went on living his own life. He loved concerts and books and plays. He loved his friends, who were good company and whom he saw often. He loved a couple of girls, too, and hoped that someday he would love one well enough to marry her.

He lived a very happy life and belonged to nothing.

Then one night in January someone knocked on his door. It was a Saturday and he was just getting dressed to go to the Academy of Music. He opened the door of his apart-

ment and looked into the hall.

There was a young man standing there. He had black rimmed glasses and a crew cut. He wore a slim, well-tailored suit.

"Mr. Westing?"

"Yes?"

"I'm from the Organization. We'd like you to join."

"What organization?"

"The Organization. The Organization for people who don't belong to any organization."

"I'm afraid I'm not interested."

"But you must be. It says here that you don't belong to anything. We're here to give you a chance to belong."

"What's the purpose of the organization?"

"It gives its members a feeling of belonging to something. Everybody's joining. You don't want to be left out, do you?"

"Not if I can help it. But I'm afraid you'll have to try somebody else."

"I can't. We never give up."

"I see. Good night, young man."

He tried to close the door. Before he was quite certain what was happening, the young man had slipped into the apartment.

"I'm going to a concert," Mr. Westing said. "They're playing Brahms' First. I've never heard it and I've been looking forward to hearing it ever since I heard his Second. I'd appreciate it if you left."

"But don't you want to belong, Mr. Westing?"

"No."

"Not to anything?"

"No."

The young man shook his head. "But most people are glad to join. We offer them what they've been looking for all their lives."

"Then go see them." He put on his jacket and adjusted his tie. "Care for a drink?"

"I don't drink."

"Why not?"

"It interferes with my work. We're out to double the

size of the Organization. I work very hard at it."

"Do you? Why?"

"It gives me a sense of belonging."

Mr. Westing started for the door. "I'm about to leave," he said. "I think it would be best if you left too."

The young man sighed. "I can see where you're going to be a difficult case."

"Probably. Will you turn off the light, please?"

HE MET his date and immediately put the incident out of his mind. They listened to Brahms' First and it was everything Westing had hoped it would be. Afterwards, when they were sitting in a bar, he told her about the Organization.

The girl seemed surprised. It was the second time he had taken her out and she didn't know him very well.

"You ought to belong to something," she said. "Why don't you join?"

"You mean that?"

"Everybody should belong to something. You can't be useless."

"I'm not useless. I make my contribution. More than most people, in fact."

"But you can't just live for yourself."

"Why not?"

She struggled. "Because

you can't," she said.

He took her home when the bar closed at midnight. The conversation was one he had engaged in with other girls but it still depressed him. He hopped the subway and went across the river to Camden, New Jersey, where they are more reasonable about the hours at which bars remain open.

THE NEXT MORNING he had a hangover. He was just pouring some tomato juice when someone knocked at his door.

"Just a minute," he said.

He opened the door. A man in a tweed suit stood in the hall. He had a relaxed, pleasant face and he smoked a pipe.

"Mr. Westing?"

"Yes?"

"I'm Dr. Cooper. May I come in?"

"I didn't ask for a doctor. I could use one but I haven't called one yet."

"Oh? What's your trouble?"

"Hangover. I had a rugged night."

"Why? What made you do a thing like that?"

He shrugged. "It's hard to say."

"Insecurity," Dr. Cooper said. "Many people try to evade their insecurities by drinking. Why don't you tell me about it?"

He hesitated. "Well," he said. "It's early."

Dr. Cooper started forward and he automatically stepped back to let him in.

"Who sent you anyway?" he asked.

"Didn't they tell you I was coming?"

"Didn't who tell me you were coming?"

"The Organization. I'm their head psychologist."

"I should have known."

"You sound annoyed."

"I'm afraid I don't want to join the Organization. Ever."

Dr. Cooper lit his pipe. "I think you should," he said. "It would relieve you of your insecurities. You obviously need to belong to something."

"Why?"

"It is a natural need in all human organisms. A man by himself is incomplete and unsatisfied. He has no outlet for his energies and his talents."

"I have very little energy and no talent."

"You're being modest. I understand you have a great deal of both." Cooper looked around the apartment. "Don't you *want* to belong, Mr. Westing?"

"No."

"Don't you belong to anything?"

"No."

"You're sure? You were a political canvasser in the last election, weren't you?"

"Yes, but that was different."

"Didn't it give you a sense of belonging?"

"Yes, but I didn't like it. I felt trapped."

"Then why did you do it?"

"I'm a citizen. I like to keep my accounts even."

"Then you didn't really belong?" the doctor said.

"Not the way you mean."

"This is very interesting. You honestly think you can live without belonging to anything?"

"Yes."

"Don't you belong to the human race?"

"Yes, and I try to keep my dues up, too. But it's more of a strain than a pleasure."

Dr. Cooper puffed on his pipe. "I can see you're going to be a real challenge," he said.

"Thank you. I intend to be."

"I've got some literature outside. I think you should read it."

"You can leave it if you like."

"I will." A few more puffs. The psychologist looked extremely serene. "You know, you're a very sick man."

"So I've been told."

"Why don't you let me cure you?"

"First you have to convince me I'm sick."

"That's true."

They talked aimlessly for

another half-hour. Cooper left, and Westing looked over the literature.

HE STARTED to throw it away. Then his conscience twinged. If he was going to fight this thing, he was going to fight it honestly. He would meet their techniques of persuasion, not evade them.

He sat down and read all the pamphlets. *The Need to Belong. The Sense of Unity.* Testimonials from members of the Organization who had found salvation in its ranks. It was all very well done and rather weakening to a man with a hangover.

He sat for a long time in his apartment, brooding over it. Then he got up and threw all the literature in the trash.

"They'll have to do better than that," he said.

The next evening, when he got back from work, he found a package in his mail. It was a long-play, high-fidelity Calypso record. The notice said it was a Get-Acquainted Gift from the Jamaican Record Society.

After supper he put the record on. When it had been playing for a while he got up and, as he often did, began to improvise dance steps to the music. It was great fun and the record was half over before he noticed the words had been subtly changing.

"House built on a rock foundation will not stand, oh no, oh no,

You must join the Organization, now now, now now...."

He snapped off the hi-fi. But the chanting went on in his mind. *You must join the Organization, you must join the Organization....*

He put on his coat and went out for a walk. When he got back he didn't feel like reading so he turned on the television set. There was a very serious play on. He settled back to watch it. It was about a young man who lived all alone in the city and of his groping toward a better life.

"If I could only belong someplace," the young man said to the girl during the second act. "I've never belonged anywhere."

"Everybody should belong," the girl said.

The young man nodded and groped with his hands. "Or else they'll be like Henry Westing," he mumbled.

Mr. Westing got up and turned off the set. He rotated it and looked at the back. There was a little box screwed in one corner.

"Very clever," he said. He tore the box off and went to bed.

He was just falling asleep when the phone rang. He reached for it in the dark.

"Westing speaking."

"Mr. Westing? This is Miss Beyle from the Organization. We're calling up to see if there are any questions you may have."

"I'm afraid I don't. I'm trying to sleep."

"So early?"

"I felt like it."

"You must be terribly lonely. Why don't you come down to Headquarters for cakes and coffee? We're having a good time."

"Miss Beyle, I've done some canvassing myself. You're doing a good job but you've got the wrong man."

She laughed. It was a very pleasant laugh.

"Thank you, Mr. Westing. You sound like the kind of man we need. We've got a big job to do and there's a place here for you anytime you want it."

"Doing what?"

"Recruiting new members."

"Good evening, Miss Beyle. I've always tried to be a gentleman. I'd better hang up before I forget myself."

He hung up and tried to sleep.

THE NEXT DAY an economist came to see him. The day after it was a social scientist and the day after that a political scientist. He listened patiently for a week as they sat in his apartment and ex-

plained the importance of the group to him.

"Man is nothing," they said. "Unless he belongs to a group."

"On the contrary," Mr. Westing said, "the group is nothing unless I belong to it."

"That's egotism."

"Probably."

But he knew he was weakening. He held out with the stubborn feeling he was resisting the tides of history. He felt very brave and strong.

There was a one-day lull. He woke up the morning after and heard a sound truck blasting away in the street one floor below.

HENRY WESTING DOES NOT BELONG HENRY WESTING BELONGS TO NOTHING REFORM HENRY WESTING REFORM HENRY WESTING...

"Outrageous," he said.

He dressed, had breakfast and started for work. People stood on their doorsteps and stared at him when he stepped onto the sidewalk. He smiled pleasantly at the driver of the truck.

"Good morning," he said. "Nice day, isn't it?"

The driver nodded sullenly.

Very good, Mr. Westing thought. *You're doing splendidly.*

At work he was tired and drawn out. He had trouble concentrating. The Depart-

ment Manager commented on it.

"You're not acting like a Company man, Henry."

"I'm a little tired. I had a hard night."

"What was she like?"

"Dismal."

Everything was dismal. The jingles ran through his head endlessly. So did the slogans and the words from the sound truck. He was beginning to doubt himself.

Perhaps they were right. Perhaps he *did* need to belong.

THAT NIGHT the sound truck was still there. It circled the block, advertising the Organization and denouncing Henry Westing.

There were signs on all the houses too. *We Belong to the Organization*, the signs said. There was a sign on every door except his.

He went upstairs and made dinner. Then he sat by the window and tried to think. Down below he could hear the sound truck.

They're getting to you, he thought. A little more and they'll have you whipped. You'd better do something.

He picked up the phone and dialed.

"Yes?" a voice answered.

"This is Henry Westing."

"Ahh, Mr. Westing. I

thought you'd be calling soon."

"You may send your representative over to my apartment this evening. Tell him to bring everything."

"Application forms?"

"Everything. Whatever you use to close the deal."

"He'll be there at eight."

"I'll be waiting."

At eight o'clock the young man rang his bell. He was burdened down with equipment.

"Come in," Mr. Westing said.

"Thank you."

"What's all that you're carrying?"

"Educational material. Mind if I set it up?"

"Go right ahead."

He poured himself a brandy and soda and watched. The young man seemed nervous and strained as he set up a hemispherical device which seemed to be a projector.

Mr. Westing glanced at a leatherette folder the young man had put aside while he worked. The folder bore a neatly labelled title: *Prospects*.

His heart skipped a beat.

He made sure the young man was absorbed in his work. Then he carefully leafed through the book.

"This Marline Harris looks like an interesting case. What's she like?"

"Did I leave that there? I'm sorry, I can't let you look at it."

"Sorry. I didn't know."

The young man took the folder and went back to work.

"Do you have a girl?" Mr. Westing asked.

"Too busy."

"Oh." He sipped his drink.

"That Harris girl certainly has been holding out, hasn't she?"

"She's a tough one. I've been to see her six times. It's funny, too, because she's so lonely."

"Really?"

"She's too independent. Men don't like her. And she's pretty nice-looking, too. It's a shame she can't act like a woman."

"Yes, I guess it is."

"There," the young man said. "Now if you'll just sit down there."

"Care for a drink?"

"I don't drink."

"Not even to be sociable?"

"Sociable? Perhaps I should at that."

Mr. Westing poured another brandy and soda. There was a great deal more brandy than soda.

"You work hard, don't you?" he said.

"We're in the middle of a big drive now. This is a very important job." The young man took a drink, the kind a

man who has always drunk water takes.

"Yes, I guess it is rather important. Organizing, getting things done. A very active life."

"That's what I like, activity. I like to *live*, not just sit around."

"Very understandable."

The young man took another drink. His face underwent a subtle change.

"Let me turn the machine on. We'd better get started."

"Did you have dinner yet?"

"I've been too busy."

"Good, good."

"Good?"

"Good that you work so hard. Shows character."

"Thank you. Now if you'll just sit back there, we'll turn the machine on." The young man seemed to be having trouble focussing his eyes.

Westing lit a good cigar and offered his guest one. "To be sociable," he said.

"In that case, all right."

"You should have another brandy to go with it," he handed him one as he spoke.

The young man took it, gulped it down automatically and turned on the machine. Westing pulled on his cigar and settled back in his chair. He made sure there was another drink by the boy's arm.

"Do you know anything about drinking?"

"Why no, I don't."

"Three's the custom. Three drinks and you're friends. You belong."

"Then I guess I better."

The room turned dark. Stars covered the walls. The young man took another swallow.

"To what do you belong?" a deep voice said. "Of what are you a part? In all this vast Universe, you alone are nothing. You alone have no meaning. But you as part of something bigger..."

A sunrise crept along the walls. The coloring was very good and Mr. Westing enjoyed it immensely.

Next to him he heard a low sound. The young man was singing.

"It's nice to watch the room spin, isn't it?" Mr. Westing asked.

"I was just thinking that. It's beautiful."

"I know. Excuse me a minute."

HE GOT UP and took the phone into the next room. As soon as he was out of earshot, he dialed the number he had memorized earlier.

The phone buzzed a few times. "Hello?" a woman answered.

"Is this Miss Marline Harris?"

"Yes, who is this?"

"My name is Henry Westing. There's a man here try-

ing to get me to join the Organization and I saw your name and your picture in his Prospects book."

"Oh, are they after you, too?"

"They've been after me for a long time. Your picture looks very attractive, Miss Harris."

"Thank you."

"Do you like music?"

"Yes, I do."

A few minutes later he tiptoed into the living room. The film was still playing, the persuasive voice still speaking. Now it was martial music and there were flags all over,

waving, inspiring.

It takes two, Westing thought. Alone they were getting me. But the two of us together will be stronger.

He bent over the couch. The boy was asleep and dreaming. His face looked peaceful.

Mr. Westing turned on a record. It was an unexpurgated reading of *The Arabian Nights*. He placed the speaker close to the boy's ear.

Then he got dressed and went out to meet Marline. He had beaten them once again. Maybe they'd get him someday, but way down deep he didn't believe it.

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DON'T SHOOT THE NEWSDEALER!

The newsstand distribution situation is improving, but there are still locations where INFINITY doesn't go on sale regularly, or appears only in limited numbers. It isn't the dealers' fault; naturally, they want to sell the magazines you want to buy. But distribution depends on a complicated chain of moves, and it takes time to eliminate all the weak links.

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We heartily endorse both these methods—but subscribing might be particularly wise now that we're monthly!

FAIRYLAND

PLANET

By JOHN SILLETT

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists, if nowhere else, on one particular planet, where there are a Daddy and a Mommy and 137 Kids. It's a very very happy place — until somebody asks the quite obvious question....

CHAPTER I

HE WAS about thirty-eight years old, Earth-scale, with a sprinkling of premature gray in his thick hair. His stride as he came toward the desk had a youthful bounce, but his eyes were a little less bright than I was accustomed to here in Fairyland. His brows were pulled slightly inward, and he wasn't smiling.

"Hi, Mike-One," I said.

"Good morning, Daddy." Very formal, and solemn. A bad sign, I thought.

I gave him a big reassuring grin and waved him into a chair. "This is a pleasant surprise, Mike-One. I hardly ever

Illustrated by RICHARD KLUGA



have a caller during Ice Cream Recess."

He squirmed in the chair, looking down at his feet. "I—I could come back later, Daddy."

"No, no," I said hastily, "that's all right. A feller must have something pretty important on his mind to bring him all the way up to Daddy's office at Ice Cream time."

Mike-One fidgeted. He tugged at a lock of hair and began to twist it. "Well..."

"Come on," I cajoled. "What's it all about? That's what Daddy's here for, you know—to listen to your troubles!"

He scuffed his feet around on the floor. Then he took out a handkerchief and blew his nose. "Well...see, I got a buddy—well, he ain't really my *best* buddy, or even second best. Sometimes we play chess together. Or checkers, only he thinks checkers is silly."

I cleared my throat and smiled patiently, waiting for him to come to the point. When he didn't go on I said, "What's his name?"

"Uh...Adam."

"Adam-Two, or -Three?"

"-Two."

I nodded. "Okay, go on."

"He talks crazy, an' he's always *wonderin'* about things. I never seen a kid to wonder

so much. An' he's only twenty-three."

I nodded again. "And now he's got *you* to wonderin' about something and you want Daddy to straighten you out. Right?"

"Uh-huh."

"Okay," I said, "shoot!"

He sniffed and scuffed his feet and scrooched around in the chair some more. Then suddenly he opened his eyes wide and looked me square in the face and blurted: "Is there *really* a Santa Claus?"

The grin I was wearing froze on my face. It seemed I'd been waiting twenty years for one of the Kids to ask me that question. *Daddy, is there a Santa Claus?* A loaded question, loaded and fused and capable of blasting the Fairyland Experiment into space-dust.

Mike-One was waiting for an answer. I had to deal with the crisis of the moment and worry about implications later.

I stood up and walked around the desk and put my hands on his shoulders. "Mike," I said, "how many Christmases can you remember?"

"Gee, Daddy, I don't know. Lots and lots."

"Let's see, now. You're thirty-eight, and Christmas comes twice a year, so that's

two times thirty-eight—seventy-six Christmases. Of course, you can't remember *all* of them. But of the ones you remember, did you ever *not* see Santa Claus, Mike?"

"No, Daddy. I always saw him."

"Well then, why come asking me if there is such a person when you know there is because you see him all the time?"

Mike-One looked more uncomfortable than ever. "Well, Adam-Two says he don't think there is a Cold Side of Number One Sun. He thinks it's hot all the way around, an' if that's so then Santa Claus couldn't live there. He says he thinks Santa Claus is just pretend an' that you or somebody from the Council of Uncles dresses up that way at Christmastime."

I scowled. How the devil had Adam-Two managed to figure *that* one out?

"Listen, Mike," I said. "You trust your Daddy, don't you?"

"Golly. Course I do!"

"All right, then. There *is* a Santa Claus, Mike-One. He's as real as you or me or the pink clouds or the green rain.... He's as real as Fairyland itself. So just don't pay any more attention to Adam-Two and his crazy notions. Okay?"

He grinned and stood up,

blinking his eyes to hold back the tears. "Th-thank you, Daddy!"

I clapped him on the back. "You're welcome, pal. Now if you hurry, you just might get back down in time for a dish of ice cream!"

WHEN the indicator over the elevator door told me that Mike-One had been safely deposited at the bottom of Daddy's Tower, I walked across the circular office to the windows facing the Compound.

Ice Cream Recess was about over and the Kids were straggling out in all directions from the peppermint-striped Ice Cream and Candy Factory just to the right of the Midway entrance. Except for the few whose turn it was to learn "something new" in Mommy's school room, they were on their own from now until Lunchtime. It was Free-Play period.

From my hundred-foot high vantage point, I watched them go; walking, running, skipping or hopping toward their favorite play spots. They had their choice of the slides and swings in the Playground, the swimming pool, tennis courts, ball diamond, gridiron, golf course, bowling alley and skating rinks—and of course, the rides on the Midway.

I watched them go, and my

heart thumped a little faster. My gang, I thought... Not *really* mine, of course, except from the standpoint of responsibility, but I couldn't have loved them more if I'd sired each and every one of them. And Mommy (sometimes I almost forgot her name was Ruth) felt the same way. It was a funny thing, this paternal feeling—even a little weird, if I stopped to remember that a baker's dozen of them were actually older than I. But a child is still a child, whatever his chronological age may be, and the inhabitants of Fairyland were children in every sense except the physical.

It was a big job, being Daddy to so many kids—but one that had set lightly on my shoulders, so far. They were a wonderful gang, healthy and happy. *Really* happy. And I couldn't think of a single place in the Universe where you'd find another hundred and thirty-seven human beings about whom you could make that statement.

A wonderful gang...all sizes and shapes and personalities, ranging in physical age from five to forty-three. Mental age...well, that was another story. After years of research and experimentation, we'd settled on eight as the optimum of mental develop-

ment. And so, there wasn't a Kid in Fairyland mentally older than eight years.....

Or was there?

Mike-One's confused story of his friend Adam-Two echoed in my head. *He says he don't think there is a Cold Side of Number One Sun. He thinks it's hot all the way around. He says he thinks Santa Claus is just pretend....*

Something was wrong. Something big and important and dangerous, and I didn't know what I was going to do about it. Adam-Two, unlike some of the older Kids, had been *born* in Fairyland. There wasn't one single solitary thing in his life history to account for this sudden, terrifying curiosity and insight. Nothing. Not even pre-natal influence, if there is such a thing.

I wondered if Ruth had noticed anything strange about him. If so, she'd never mentioned it.

I decided I'd better have a Daddy-and-son chat with young Adam right away.

I WALKED through the Midway in the warm, twin-star sunshine, waving and shouting back at the Kids on the rides who shrieked "Hi, Daddy!" as they caught sight of me. Nobody had seen

Adam-Two, so I escaped after a brief roller coaster ride ("Aw, come on Daddy, just once!") with a trio of husky thirty-year-olds who called themselves the "Three Bears."

Adam-Two wasn't at the Playground either, nor the Swimming Pool, nor the Tennis Courts. I decided he must be in the Recreation Hall, so I headed in that direction, taking a short cut through Pretty Park at the north end of the Midway. The park was a big place, stretching east and west from the Baseball Diamond to the Pony Stables at the edge of Camping Woods, and northward as far as the Golf Course.

This was my favorite spot in Fairyland. I always came here when I wanted to relax, or think something through without any interruptions. It had once been an oasis on this otherwise barren desert planet, and was therefore the logical site for the Fairyland Compound. An underground spring in the center of the park was our main water supply. The clear, cold fluid bubbled out of the rocks to form a lovely lake which was perhaps fifty yards across at the widest part. The lakeshore was ringed with tall, unearthly palm-like trees—strange and beautiful.

I found Adam-Two there beside the lake, sitting on a

rock with his shoes and socks off, dangling his bare feet in the cold water and gazing upward into the swaying tree-tops.

"Hi, Adam-Two!"

"Hello." He didn't seem either surprised or glad to see me.

He was above average height, well over six feet, and exceptionally thin. Physically awkward, too, I remembered. He invariably struck out on the Ball Diamond, invariably sliced into the rough on the Golf Course. His hair was dark and curly and he had a nervous way of ruffling it with his fingers, so that it was always in disarray.

But the most unusual thing about him was his eyes. They were ice-blue, set deep back under a high, ridged forehead. They stared out at you with a kind of ruthless, unblinking intensity that made you uncomfortable, and I wondered why I'd never noticed those eyes before. It was like looking at a stranger, though I'd known him since he was little more than a baby.

I sat down alongside him on the rock. "Whatcha doin'?"

He didn't answer for awhile. His bare feet made white froth in the water. At last he said, "Thinking."

I waited, but apparently he wasn't going to elaborate. "I hear tell you've been doing

some of your thinkin' out loud," I said quietly.

No answer.

"It's all right to think," I went on. "That's good for us. But a feller ought to be careful about sounding off to the other Kids about somethin' maybe he don't know anything about."

Still no answer. He kept lashing the water with his feet. His indifference and lack of attention were beginning to annoy me, and I was annoyed at myself for being annoyed with him and for beating around the bush with him.

"What makes the trees grow?"

His query was so sudden and unexpected that it caught me off guard. That made me more annoyed than ever.

"You're supposed to have learned that from Mommy in school," I said curtly.

Another long pause. "She says the fairies touch the trees and flowers with their magic wands. She says that's what makes them grow."

"That's right."

"I don't believe in fairies," he said, matter-of-factly.

I scowled fiercely at him. "Oh, you *don't*, eh? First it's Santa Claus, now the fairies. The next thing we know you'll stop believing in Mommies and Daddies!"

He looked up into the tree-

tops again. "I think the sun has something to do with it," he went on, as though I hadn't said a word. "They seem to be sort of reaching for the sun, as if the sun gave them life..."

His eyes met mine—cold and intensely blue and very frank. "Why don't you tell me the truth?"

I stood up, fighting to control my rising anger. "Are you calling your Daddy a *liar*?" I shouted.

"I only asked a simple question."

"All right." I was regaining a little of my composure, but it was evident that I needed more time to think this through. "Let's just forget it for now... Let's go over to the Rec Hall and have a game of chess, shall we?" Adam was Chess Champ of Fairyland.

Splash-splash-splash. His feet fluttered wildly in the water again. "I can't," he said. *Splash-splash-splash.*

I raised my eyebrows. "Why not?"

"I'm not through thinking."

What he needs is a spanking, I thought grimly. But spankings were outlawed in Fairyland. They were old-fashioned, and conducive to the generation of neuroses. I'd never considered the regulation as a handicap—until now.

"Okay, feller," I said, with

exaggerated calm, "but just let me hear one more report—just *one*, mind you—about you telling the Kids there's no Santa Claus, or no fairies, and you'll be on the No Ice Cream List for a month!"

Splash-splash-splash. "I get tired of ice cream every day."

I stalked away, not trusting myself to speak.

THAT NIGHT after the Kids were bedded down in the dormitories, Mommy and I stretched out in our lounge-chairs to watch the video-cast from Earth. The news was dull, the kind that reminds you history repeats itself, and so what?

The Martian colony was complaining about taxes and threatening to secede; the campaign for Galaxy Manager was in full swing and the network was allotting equal mudslinging and empty-promise time to each Party; the Solar Congress had doubled the defense budget for next year; and an unconfirmed report had been received that an unidentified space ship had landed on the dark side of Earth's moon. I yawned and switched off the set.

"Why the hell does anybody want to live on Earth?" I said.

Ruth smiled at me, a sympathetic wifely smile. She'd been watching me all evening

and she knew something wasn't right. "What's the matter, Harry?"

I sighed. "Tell me about Adam-Two."

"Oh. Him."

"Yeah. Him."

She looked a little embarrassed. "I didn't suppose you knew. Did he tell you?"

Now I was confused. "Did he tell me what?"

She stood up suddenly. "Stop sparring with me, Harry. Did he tell you or not?"

"Tell me *what*?" I almost shouted it this time.

"That he...he asked me to play House with him."

"Ruth!"

She laughed, a little shakily. "Don't get hysterical, Daddy. I didn't do it."

I slumped in my seat. "That's encouraging."

"What d'you suppose is the matter with him, Harry?"

"I was about to ask you the same thing," I said. "I never thought of him as being much different from the rest. A little more shy, maybe, and a little less exuberant on the physical side. Not enough to worry about, though... How's he in school?"

She frowned. "He's in the fifth year of third grade now. An above-average student, and very inquisitive. And kind of shy, like you said. I always thought he was well-adjusted, although I don't think he ever

plays House with the same girl twice. I just never thought of him as a problem, until today. That—that *question!*”

“Yeah,” I said wryly. “he seems to be full of questions.” I told her about my visit from Mike-One and the chat with Adam. “Well, Mommy,” I said, “it looks like after all these years it’s finally happening...”

“What’s finally happening, Daddy?”

I sighed. “One of our Kids is growing up.”

CHAPTER II

I SUPPOSE it was partly my fault that the Adam-Two business very nearly got out of hand during the next few days. In the first place, I was at a loss to know what to do about him, and in the second place I was sweating day and night over the blankety-blanked Annual Report for the Council of Uncles, who were due to arrive the following week. I hated paper work, with the result that I usually got caught short and had to compress a whole years’ work into the space of a few days.

The Council of Uncles, of course, wasn’t really any such thing. The title was just a nickname for the benefit of the Kids. Officially, they were the Inter-Galactic In-

spection Council of the Solar Committee for Sociological Research. The purpose of the Committee was to find out what people need to be happy, and the purpose of the Inspection Council was to check around and see who was happy and who wasn’t.

Some two hundred years ago, society had reached a kind of static condition in the realm of scientific development. For the first time in seven thousand years of civilization, Man was faced with almost total leisure. And to his great surprise, he found himself no nearer happiness than when he started. And so a crusade had begun; Man decided at last to turn his knack for research and development inward upon himself. Scientists began to ponder and experiment with the questions that had plagued philosophers for ages.

The coming of Automation had relieved men from the burden of working for a living, and left them with a choice between cultural pursuits and pure recreation. Which should it be? A good deal of rivalry, some friendly and some otherwise, existed between the proponents of the two major schools of thought. The intellectuals were dubbed “Highbrows,” the pleasure-boys were known as “Happy Hooligans.”

Mankind, the Highbrows contended, was still undergoing a kind of evolution—a gradual transition from a purely physical or animal existence to a purely mental or intellectual state. The machines had released him from physical bondage—as they had been intended to do—so that he might rise at last above his animal beginnings. Man could now rise to undreamed-of cultural heights, or he could sink into the depths of sensual degradation. The choice was up to him, but if he chose the latter Nature might very well not permit him to survive.

Fiddle-de-dee, said the Hooligans. The trouble with Man was that he has always insisted on pretending to be something he isn't, always seeking some deep meaning and significance in life instead of relaxing and enjoying it. Excessive doses of education and culture merely serve to compound this felony, magnify his inferiority complex, and make him thoroughly unhappy. Teach people how to enjoy themselves instead of how to be miserable, they cried.

Fairyland was a sort of sociological laboratory for the Happy Hooligans—a colossal, costly experiment that had been going on for some forty-five years. It was designed to

test the theory that most of the misery in the world stems from the fact that kids are allowed to grow up, to abandon their childhood dreams, to quit having *fun*. They learn that there really isn't any Santa Claus, and they never quite recover from the shock.

So far, the experiment appeared to be a successful one. Fairyland Kids were happy kids, and they all believe in Santa Claus.

All but one...

ON DAY-ONE of that ill-starred week, the merry-go-round on the Midway broke down. Investigation disclosed that Adam-Two had found my tool kit and had disassembled the remote-control drive mechanism to "find out what makes it go."

He was placed on half-rations of Ice Cream for a period of ten days.

ON DAY-TWO, Adam was discovered late at night, after Taps, in the washroom of the boys dorm swearing in applicants for a "Question and Answer Club." When questioned as to the purpose of this so-called club, he refused to answer. His charter members, however, confessed eagerly. The Club was to dream up among themselves a Question of the Week. Questions were to be presented

weekly to Mommy and Daddy and unless satisfactory answers were forthcoming, the club members would refuse to eat. The first Question of the Week was: Why are there two kinds of Kids; boys and girls?

Adam-Two was placed on No-Dessert-at-Dinner for a period of one week.

ON DAY-FIVE, Adam was missing from his bed at Taps. He had not registered to spend the night playing House in one of the cottages in Pretty Park either, so I set out to find him.

It took me an hour and a half, but I finally located him on the far side of the Golf Course. He was attacking the Great Wall of Fairyland. The Great Wall, over a hundred feet high, surrounded the entire Compound. It was encased in a pseudo-gravity field with a repellant force of $-3g$ and you could no more approach the Great Wall than you could fly.

I watched in stunned amazement as Adam-Two, the Kid who despised football, time after time took a running start, lowered his head and charged at the wall like a varsity tackler, only to be thrown for a five-yard loss.

When I gathered he had no intention of giving up until he dropped from exhaustion,

I walked over to where the G-field had thrown him after his last lunge. "Adam, what are you trying to do?"

He stood up, breathing heavily, and brushed himself off. "I...wanted to see... what was on the...other side."

"There's nothing nice over there," I said. "It's a bad place. Fairyland is a much nicer place to be."

"I wanted to see for myself." His voice was as devoid of emotion as his face. "Why can't I get near the wall? What is it that throws me back?"

"The fairies have cast a spell on the wall," I said. "A magic spell, because they don't want us to go to the bad place. They want us to stay in Fairyland where we're happy."

Abruptly, Adam started off across the Golf Course toward the dormitory. "Okay," he said quietly. "Okay...Daddy."

Adam-Two was placed on Limited Midway Privileges for a period of four days.

ALL OF WHICH gave me an uneasy and alien feeling of helplessness. My self-confidence, based on twenty years' experience with the Kids of Fairyland and before that five years' experience as a Space Scoutmaster on Earth, was visibly shaken.

Adam wasn't just being ornery, the way most any kid is likely to be at times. If it had been just that, the loss of privileges would have remedied the situation. Neither was he actually malicious. He obviously wasn't out to harm anyone, he was simply *curious*. Curious in a way that was distinctly unhealthy for the rest of Fairyland. He was growing up, and I didn't know how to cope with him.

So I wrote him up in the Annual Report.

CHAPTER III

IT WAS a big day in Fairyland whenever the Council of Uncles came. Bigger in a way than either Christmas or Circus Time, because they came twice a year and the Council of Uncles only once.

I'd adjusted the controls of the Weather Generators the night before so that Arrival Day dawned warm and clear. The Kids were all dressed in Sunday-best and the festival flags were flying from the tops of all the buildings. Across the side of Daddy's Tower that faced the desert and spaceport, a gay, multi-colored banner constructed by the third-graders proclaimed: **WELCOME UNCLES!**

The Kids were gathered in the courtyard at the foot of the Tower, their eyes scan-

ning the green sky for the first glimpse of the Uncles' spaceship. Up in the Tower at the radar console, I picked up a blip at about three hundred kilometers. I interrogated, and the target trace blinked in the proper code sequence.

I turned on the kiddiecom system and announced that we had just received a message from the Cold Side of Number One Sun. The sound of cheering drifted up from the courtyard.

"The Uncles will be here in ten minutes," I said. "Mommy, will you lead us in a rehearsal of the 'Welcome Song,' please?"

I stood by the window, listening to the vast sound of a hundred and thirty-seven voices, each trying to outdo the other in amplitude and sincerity.

*"Welcome to Fairyland,
Welcome to Fairyland,
Welcome dear Uncles
To Fairyland, today!"*

It was discordant, it was childish—it was even ludicrous—but I loved it. I loved it without quite understanding it, and it made me feel happy yet sad at the same time....

I took the elevator down to the loading platform and drove the monorail car out to the spaceport, which was ten miles from Fairyland—across the arid, lifeless desert. We'd

built the dock close enough for easy access yet far enough away so that the awesome sight of a spaceship landing or blasting off wouldn't generate too much curiosity in the Kids. It was a link with the Outside World, a world that had no reality for them and for that reason could not stand too close an inspection.

The Earth ship was snuggling comfortably into the dock as I climbed out of the car. I ran across the landing platform and pressed the control switch that lowered the gangway against the ship's hatch.

Boswell, the Council Chairman, was first down the gangway. He was short, fat without being flabby, and completely bald except for a fringe of white fuzz around the back of his head and over his ears. He had an oversized nose, and bright blue eyes that twinkled perpetually. The Kids called him Uncle Chub.

"Well well well, Harry. You look fine. Fine. Good to see you. How's it going?"

"Fine, sir. Just fine."

His three colleagues followed close on his heels. I shook hands with each of them. Two of them I'd known as long as I had Boswell, ever since I'd become the Third Daddy of Fairyland.

There was old Eaker, lean

and tall and solemn, with never much to say. The Kids called him Uncle Thin. ("Good to see you, Harry. How are you doing?") Then there was Hopkins, about my age and therefore younger than either Boswell or Eaker. A nice, medium guy, Hopkins—medium build, medium gray hair, medium voice, affable without being garrulous, intelligent without being stuffy. The Kids called him Uncle Hoppy. ("Hi, Dad. How's the gang?")

The fourth Councilman was a stranger. Boswell introduced him as William Pettigrew. He was slightly built, fidgety, shrill-voiced and weasel-faced. His mouth was fixed in a perpetual smirk, and I formed a dislike for him—immediate and intense. I wondered what the Kids would call him, and a suggestion immediately came to mind: Uncle Jerk.

"Can't say as I approve of this place at all," said Pettigrew as we climbed aboard the mono-car. "Matter of fact, I strongly *disapprove*."

"Well, sir," I said, trying not to gnash my teeth, "I don't quite see how you can be certain until you've seen it."

"Principle. Matter of principle."

I didn't answer. Hoppy caught my eye and winked.

A ROUSING cheer came from the Kids down in the courtyard as we climbed out of the car. Then I heard the brief, plaintive whimper of Mommy's pitch-pipe and once again the "Welcome Song" reverberated throughout Fairyland. The Uncles waved down at the Kids, with the exception of Pettigrew, who fidgeted until the song was finished. As we descended in the lift, he said: "This place must cost the taxpayers a tidy sum."

"As a matter of fact, we're almost self-sustaining," I said. "A few tons of reactor fuel per annum is all we require to—"

"Don't humor him, Harry," said Boswell. "Let him read the Report."

Pettigrew glared, but except for an inaudible mutter he took Boswell's squelch without comment. I was wondering what significance might be hidden in this addition of a fourth Uncle to the Council, but I finally shrugged it off. Earthside politics bored the hell out of me.

Mommy was waiting to greet us as we stepped out of the elevator and Uncle Chub gave her a big hug. "How's the First Lady of the Galaxy?" he said, and she brightened as though it were a spontaneous compliment she

was hearing for the first time instead of the twentieth.

Then the Kids broke ranks and milled around us, squealing and laughing and firing questions about Santa Claus. Being new, Pettigrew received a good deal of attention. "Who are you?" "What's your Uncle-name?" "Do you live with Santy Claus or with the fairies?" "How cold is the cold side of Number One Sun?" "Do you like merry-go-rounds better than rolly-coasters?"

The pelting of this verbal barrage sent him spinning like a crippled spaceship and I wedged myself through the ring of Kids to rescue him. "Come on, gang! Break it up!"

Pettigrew gave me a look of wide-eyed terror. "They're insane," he whispered. "Look at them! They're adults, but they act like—like—"

"Like children," I said. "That's what they are, Mr. Pettigrew. I thought the other Councilors had explained—"

"They did. But I never thought—well, I mean this is awful!"

I grinned, "You'll get used to it."

"Whole thing is ludicrous. Ludicrous!" He waved an all-encompassing hand that included the Kids, Fairyland, its basic concept, and me.

I was getting more disenchanted with this character all the time. "Now just a minute, you—"

A strong hand closed over my arm and I looked around into the grinning face of Hoppy. "Let's get the program started, eh?" he said.

THE NEXT three hours were a hodge-podge of well-rehearsed chaos. The Council had to inspect everything so they could return a first-hand report to the Solar Committee for Sociological Research, and on the other hand all the Kids had to show off for the Uncles.

The first stop on the agenda was the Arts & Crafts Building where we exhibited the drawings and clay animals and models and beadwork and a thousand-and-one other items the Kids had made with their own hands. From there we adjourned to the school where Ruth had displayed a few samples of the work of each class.

"We only have one teacher," I explained to Pettigrew, "because each class meets for just an hour a day. We stagger the classes, kindergarten through third grade. The Kids spend an average of five years in each grade, including kindergarten."

"Ridiculous!"

"There's nothing ridiculous

about it," I said, patiently, "for the simple reason that they're not in any hurry."

"Hmph. Well, I *am*. Let's get on with it."

From the school the procession migrated to the Recreation Hall. We visited the game room for demonstrations by Checker Champ Mike-One and Chess Champ Adam-Two, then witnessed exhibitions at the Bowling Alley, Basketball Court, and the Ice and Roller Rinks. I explained to Pettigrew that each Kid was Champ of something. There were enough categories for everybody, and nobody was allowed to be Champ of more than one thing at a time. Uncle Petty mumbled something I didn't catch.

We skirted the Midway and took a tour of the Pretty Park. Here at last was something Pettigrew could accept; he almost smiled as he saw the huge flower beds raised by the Botany Team. But the almost-smile disappeared as we explained to him the purpose of the little cottages nestled among the trees. His eyes bugged and his face became quite red, and his voice failed him so that he could only sputter.

"We only retard the mind," I explained, "not the body. Playing House is just another recreational activity, like riding the merry-go-round or

playing golf. The Kids enjoy it, but they don't make a big thing out of it. We treat the whole subject quite casually, and frankly."

I'll say this for Pettigrew, he had spunk. He swallowed his moral indignation, squared his thin shoulders, took a deep breath and managed to find his voice. But it failed him again on the word "pregnancy."

"We allow that to occur only rarely," I said. "We're building to a static population of a hundred and forty. At the current rate of one Dolly per year, in three more years we'll—"

"One *what* per year?"

"Dolly." I caught Hoppy's muffled snort behind me and managed to hold down the size of my grin. "The Kids call it 'making a Dolly.' It's a rare treat and the girls look forward to it."

When the danger of apoplexy had subsided, Mr. Pettigrew choked, "This—this is...*monstrous! Monstrous!*" And, having found the right word, he savored it: "Monstrous."

There were too many kids around to pursue the discussion. Little pitchers, I thought. I was especially concerned about Adam-Two, who had been lurking as close to the group of Uncles as possible, soaking in everyword like

a damp sponge. Twice I whispered to Ruth to decoy him out of earshot, but she was too busy to keep an eye on him all the time. She'd no sooner turn her back than he'd edge up through the crowd again, a look of fierce curiosity on his thin face.

From the Pretty Park we made our way to the Golf Course, the Football and Baseball Fields, then the Tennis Courts and Swimming Pool. Demonstrations were given at each stop, with much shouting and applause. After the final demonstration by the Diving Champ, we made a tour of the dormitories. Pettigrew went through a minor tantrum again when the Dolly Team showed him through the small Maternity Ward in the girls' dorm.

At last we filed into the Auditorium for the Happy Show. The Kids who weren't Champs of some game or craft were all in the Happy Show. We watched, listened, and applauded for the Song Champ, the Somersault Champ, the Dancing Champ, the Yo-yo Champ, and many more. The *piece-de-resistance* was a playlet entitled "The Uncles' Visit," where three of the boys imitated Uncles Chub, Hoppy, and Thin. (We hadn't been expecting Uncle Petty, so he wasn't in it. Probably

just was well, I thought.) It was a riot.

AFTER the show, lollipops were passed out to everybody and it was Free Time until lunch. Mommy stayed below to keep an eye on things and I herded the Uncles up to the conference room in the Tower.

Uncle Chub Boswell rapped the meeting to order. He paid me the standard compliment about how healthy and happy the Kids looked and what a fine job Ruth and I were doing here, then asked me to read the Annual Report.

Before I could get my papers in order, Pettigrew piped, "Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask a few pertinent questions."

"All right, Petty. Make it brief."

"Thank you. I should like to ask—er, what was your name again?"

"Barnaby," I said. "Harry Barnaby. Just call me Daddy."

He glared my grin into oblivion. "Mr. Barnaby, I would like you to explain to me the purpose of this installation."

For some reason, the tone of his voice on the word "installation" infuriated me. "What the devil are you driving at?" I snapped.

There was a faint suggestion of a sneer on his pasty

little face. "I'm interested in ascertaining, Mr. Barnaby, just how you justify the continued conduction of this perpetual circus and picnic for the mentally retarded, at tremendous expense to the taxpayers."

I felt an almost irresistible urge to lean across the conference table and hit him in the mouth. I turned to Boswell and said, "Chub, I think you'd better get this pipsqueak out of here."

Boswell glowered at Pettigrew. "Petty, I told you to watch your lip."

"I don't have to take that kind of talk from you, Boswell!"

"Yes you do, as long as I'm Chairman of this committee!"

"Don't be surprised if we have a new Chairman shortly after we return to Earth," said Mr. Pettigrew smugly.

Boswell grinned at me. "Mr. Pettigrew figgers he's got influence, Harry. He has a second cousin on the Senate Committee of the Galactic Council. Figgers he'll have me sacked and make himself Chairman. He ain't been a bureaucrat long enough to appreciate the red tape involved in that kind of caper."

I laughed, and managed to look at Pettigrew without wanting to hit him. "I don't mind questions," I said, "as

long as they're put to me in a civil manner.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Pettigrew, what the purpose of this 'installation' is. We're trying to find out how to make people happy. And we think we've got the answer. Don't let them find out that there's no Santa Claus, that everybody dies, that it doesn't always pay to be good. Don't let them know that sex is dirty, childbirth is painful, and not everybody can be a champion. Don't let them find out what a stupid, sordid, ugly, ridiculous place the world is. In short, Mr. Pettigrew, don't let them grow up!"

"Nonsense!"

"Nonsense, Mr. Pettigrew? You saw them. You saw how they live. You saw their faces and heard them laugh. Judge for yourself."

Pettigrew scowled at me. "Am I to understand, Mr. Barnaby, that you seriously propose that this quaint little...er...experiment be adopted as a way of life, for everybody?"

"Why not?" I was warming to my subject now, and I leaned across the table toward him. "Why not? We've had seven thousand years of civilization. We spent the first six thousand learning more and more subtle and complex reasons for hating one another and the last thousand in

developing more elaborate and fiendish ways of destroying one another. And out of our so-called scientific advancement, accidentally, has come a thing called automation. The age of the laborer and breadwinner is past. What are we going to do, Mr. Pettigrew? Let man use his leisure time to discover even more effective ways of destroying himself...or let him live in a Fairyland?"

Uncle Petty turned his head slowly, letting his gaze travel around the room as if he were seeking moral support. He started to say something, then shook his head.

"Think of it," I went on, "a whole world full of happy kids! And a new kind of aristocracy—the Daddies and Mommies. They and their children would be trained to supervise, to keep an eye on things, just as Ruth and I do here. The Kids could be trained to do what little maintenance the machines require—"

"You're insane!" Pettigrew exploded. "That's it! You're crazier than the rest of them out there. You—"

I don't know whether or not I really intended to hit him, or how things might have turned out if I had. Luckily, Boswell jumped to his feet and pulled me back as I made a lunge across the table.

"Take it easy, Harry," he said quietly. Then he turned to Pettigrew. "Petty, we've had enough out of you for today. Open your mouth again and I'll lock you in the ship till we're ready to leave!"

Pettigrew slid lower in his chair and after a brief mumbling was silent. I apologized to Boswell for losing my temper. "Forget it, Harry," he chuckled. "Wanted to hit 'im myself lots of times... Well, let's have the Report, eh?"

THE BULK of the Annual Report consisted of a lot of dry statistics about the hydroponics crop, the weight and height and emotional ratings of the Kids, reports on certain educational and recreational experiments, and so on. The problem of Adam-Two was the last item on the agenda, and as I read it they perked up their ears and stopped yawning.

"...and in light of these developments, the undersigned recommends that Adam-Two be transported to Earth and given a normal education so that he may be assimilated into the society."

I stood for a moment, holding the papers in my hand, looking from one to the other of that quartet of blank, silent faces.

Finally, Boswell cleared his throat. "Harry, let me get this

straight. You think this... what's his name? Adam-Two. You actually think he's—ah—growing up?"

I nodded. "There isn't a doubt in *my* mind, and Ruth agrees."

"And you think we oughta take him back to Earth with us?"

"Sure, I do. I think that's the only solution, don't you?"

Eaker coughed discreetly. "I'm afraid it isn't any solution at all."

"What would we do with him?" Hoppy wanted to know.

"Look," I said, "the kid is a misfit. He doesn't belong here. He belongs on Earth where he can get an education and maybe a chance to... to make something of himself."

Boswell cleared his throat again. "Seems like he'd be a worse misfit on Earth than he is here, Harry."

"He would not!" I snapped. "He's a sharp kid. He'd adapt himself in no time."

Eaker spoke up again. "It seems to me we're overlooking an important point here, gentlemen. Isn't Fairyland supposed to be a sort of testing ground for a particular sociological theory? It seems to me we'd be defeating our purpose if we removed this lad just because he doesn't seem to fit. If the world is to be convert-

ed to a Fairyland, there'll be more Adam-Two's from time to time. What's to be done with them?"

"Nuts!" I said. "It's not the same problem, and you know it. If the whole world were like this place, Fairyland would be the only reality there was. Guys like Adam would *have* to accept it.... Why don't you just admit that you don't want to be bothered with this?"

Boswell rapped for order. "Gentlemen, there's no need to waste any more time with this.... Now Harry, you know we've got no real jurisdiction in this. We're just advisory. The Kids are all wards of the Solar State and if you want to appeal for help through official channels, we'll be glad to initiate a request for you when we get back to Earth."

I realized now that I might as well have saved my breath. It was the old bureaucratic buck-pass. For twenty years, the Uncles' visit had been merely an annual ritual—and they intended to keep it that way. They had a nice, soft touch and they weren't going to let anything spoil it. Sure, they'd initiate a report...and by the time it filtered through the spiral nebula of red-tape, Adam and I would both have died of old age.

I gathered up my papers.

"Just forget it," I said sourly. "If there's no further business, let's adjourn for lunch and I'll take you back to the ship."

AT THE SPACEPORT we shook hands and Hoppy hung back after the others had gone up the gangway. He put his hand on my shoulder. "I'm sorry about this Adam thing, Harry."

"Forget it."

"I know how you feel, and I wish we could help. But you know how it is...."

"Sure. I know how it is."

"The Administration's all wound up in the Rearmament Program. Doubling the size of the space fleet. Everybody's edgy, wondering whether there's going to be war with the Centauri crowd. Hardly anyone remembers there is such a place as Fairyland. If we go back and kick up a fuss, no telling what might happen. Most of the Government budget is earmarked for defense. We might all find ourselves among the unemployed."

I looked at him for a long time, until his eyes couldn't meet mine any more. "Hoppy," I said quietly, "how long has it been since they stopped thinking of Fairyland as a practical possibility?"

He shrugged, still not looking at me. "I don't know, Har-

ry. Twelve, maybe fifteen years, I suppose. There aren't many Happy Hooligans around any more—at least they aren't working at it. They're all getting rich off the defense effort."

"So they're just letting us drift along out here because it's easier than disbanding the thing and trying to rehabilitate the Kids. That right?"

He nodded. "That's about it."

I took a deep breath, and shook my head. "Why, Hoppy? Why?"

"Oh, hell!" he blurted. "Let's face it, Harry. The whole idea just isn't practical. It would never work."

"Never work!" I shouted. "It's been working for forty years!"

"Sure, sure—it works here. On an isolated desert planet a billion miles from Earth, it works fine. But you can't remake the whole world into a Fairyland, Harry. You just can't do it!"

There was a sinking, sickening feeling in my guts. "Okay, Hoppy. Okay... Blast off."

He stood looking at me for a moment, then turned and hurried up the gangway.

Just as he reached the hatch, two figures emerged suddenly from the ship. One wore the uniform of a Space Fleet astro-navigator. The

other was Adam-Two.

I ran up the gangway in time to hear the navigator telling Hoppy, "I found him in the forward chart room."

"Adam!" I yelled. "What are you up to now?"

"I wanted to go along," he said. "I wanted to see if they were really going to the cold side of Number One Sun."

I grabbed his arm and hustled him down to the monocar. We slid clear of the dock and about half a mile away I stopped the car to watch them blast off.

Adam's eyes were wide with wonderment. "What makes it go?"

"Rocket motors," I said absently. I watched the ship, now just a mote disappearing in the twilight sky. And I thought, *There goes the tag end of a twenty-year dream.*

That was all it had ever been; I knew that now. Just a dream, and a stupid one at that. I'd deluded myself even more than the Kids.

"What's a rocket motor?"

I looked at Adam. "What? What did you say?"

"I said, what's a rocket motor?"

"Who said anything about rocket motors?"

"You did. I asked you what makes it go and you said, rocket motors."

I frowned. "Forget it.

Magic makes it go. Santa Claus magic."

"Okay, Daddy. Sure."

Something about his tone made me look sharply at him. He was grinning at me; a cynical, adult-type grin. Yesterday it would have made me furious. Today, for some crazy reason, it made me burst out laughing. I laughed for quite a long time, and then as suddenly as it began, it was over. I rumbled his hair and started the car.

"Adam," I said, "take a tip from your Daddy. Stop trying to find out about things. Hang onto your dreams. Dreams are happy things, and truth is sometimes pretty ugly...."

CHAPTER IV

THAT NIGHT after Taps I told Ruth about the Council meeting and about my chat with Hoppy at the ship. She came and sat beside me and, in the age-old manner of a loyal wife, assured me that everything was going to be all right.

I stood up and began prowling around the room. "It's *not* all right. The plain and simple truth is that we've thrown away twenty years on this pipe dream. All for *nothing*!"

"You don't mean that, Harry. Not for *nothing*."

"The hell I don't! Remember how skeptical we were when we first heard about this place? Then old Hogarth, Daddy-Two, came to see us. Remember how we fell for it? We were going to be doing something *important*! We were the vanguard of a world revolution—the greatest thing since the invention of people. A great sociological advancement... What a laugh! Fairyland is nothing but—a—an orphan home! And mark my words, sooner or later they're going to come and close the place down!"

Ruth patted the seat beside her. "Harry, come back and sit down."

I scowled at her. But I sat. "Harry," she said, "I'm just a woman. I don't know much about world revolutions or sociology. But I know one thing. No matter what happens, these twenty years haven't been wasted. We've been *happy*, Harry. And so have the Kids."

"I wonder.... Are they happy, Ruth? Do we even know what happiness is?"

She smiled. "Darling, please don't go abstract on me. I know they're happy."

"And what about Adam?"

She shook her head. "I suppose he's not. But the percentage is still pretty high, don't you think? You said Fairyland is nothing more

than an orphan home, and maybe you're right. I guess I never really thought of it any other way."

I stared at the woman who had been my wife for twenty-three years as if I'd never seen her before. "You mean you never, not even at the beginning, believed in the idea of Fairyland?"

"I just didn't think much about it, Harry. I believed in the Kids, that's all. I figured that our job was to look after them and keep them happy and well. We've done that job, and I think it's a pretty fine achievement. I'm proud—for both of us!"

"Thanks," I said dully. "You know, Mommy, I'd almost forgotten..."

"Almost forgotten what, Daddy?"

I laughed shortly. "What it feels like to find out there's no Santa Claus!"

IN THE two-week interval between Uncles' Day and Christmas-Two, the air in Fairyland became supercharged with a kind of hushed expectancy, and of course everybody was being extra-special good in the manner of kids everywhere during Santa's Season. The holiday spirit should have been contagious, but this season I wasn't having any. My pet theory and private dream had been

scuttled, so I sulked around feeling sorry for myself.

Even Adam-Two was a model of juvenile deportment. Never late for meals, always washed behind his ears, and—best of all—he stopped asking embarrassing questions. This sudden change probably would have made me suspicious if I'd been thinking clearly. As it was, I merely felt grateful. And of course Mommy was too busy helping the girls make popcorn and candy to concern herself with such things.

On Christmas Eve, I turned the weather machines to *Snow*—a category specially reserved for our two Christmases—and the big, soft white flakes came drifting lazily down into Fairyland. The lights were out in all the buildings, the Kids were asleep, and our two moons were bright and full. Ruth and I stood silently on the front porch, watching the snow and the moonlight.

"Harry..."

"Mm?"

"Do you still think these twenty years were wasted?"

I slipped an arm around her waist. "It isn't fair to ask me that on a night like this.... But if they were, I'm glad we wasted them together."

She leaned over and kissed

my cheek. "Thank you, Daddy. Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas, Mommy."

NEXT MORNING, I donned my pillow-stuffed Santa uniform and itchy white whiskers and stood with Mommy on the Auditorium stage, beaming into a bright sea of expectant faces.

"Merry Christmas, everybody. Mer-r-r-y Christmas! Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho!"

"Merry Christmas, Santa Claus!" came the answering chorus.

"Did you all manage to bust up your toys from last Christmas?"

"Ye-e-e-s!"

"Good!" I boomed. "Ho-ho-ho! Can't get new ones unless we bust up the old ones, you know!"

We all sang "Christmas in Fairyland," and then it was Present Passing Time. Santa's Space Sled was behind me, chock full of toys. I reached back and pulled out a package.

"Julia-Three!"

"Here I am, Santy!" She came running down the aisle, a lovely blonde of about twenty-five, curls flying.

"Have you been a good girl, Julia-Three?"

"Yes, Santy."

"And you wanted a new dolly?"

She nodded emphatically.

"You broke your dolly from last Christmas?"

"Yes, Santy."

"Fine."

She took her present and went skipping off the far side of the stage.

Everything went smoothly for perhaps half an hour and the sled was about half empty when I snagged a small, flat package marked "Adam-Two."

He strolled down the aisle and up onto the stage. His eyes were bright—a little too bright—and there was just the hint of a smile on his thin face.

"Well, well, Adam-Two! Have you been a good boy?"

"Not very."

I gave him a fierce Santa Claus frown. "Well, now, that's too bad. But old Santa's glad that you're honest about it. . . . By the way, you didn't send old Santy a letter, did you?"

"No. I didn't think I'd get a present because I wasn't good. Anyway, I didn't know what I wanted." He was staring fixedly at my beard.

"Well, suppose we give you a present anyway, and you try very hard to be good between now and next Christmas, eh? Ho-ho-ho-ho!"

We'd gotten him a set of chess men. He took the package without looking at it.

"Where's Daddy?" he asked suddenly.

It was so unexpected, so matter-of-fact, that it caught me off balance. The Kids were always too excited on Christmas morning to worry about where Daddy might be.

"Well, sir...ho-ho-ho...ah, Daddy was kinda sleepy this morning, so he thought he'd rest up a bit and let Mommy and Santa Claus look after things—Merry Christmas, Adam-Two! Now, let's see who's next—"

I turned to pull another package from the sled, and Adam took one quick step forward, grabbed my beard and yanked hard! It came away in his hands, and there I stood with my naked Daddy-face exposed to all the Kids.

The silence was immediate, and deadly.

Then I heard Adam's sudden, sharp intake of breath that was almost like a sob. I glanced at him for just an instant, but in that instant I glimpsed the terrible disappointment he must have felt. It was all there, in his eyes and in his face. He hadn't wanted that beard to come off. He'd wanted Santa Claus to be real....

He turned away from me and faced the Kids, holding that phony beard high over

his head. "You see!" he shrilled. "It's just like I said! There really *isn't* any Santa Claus. He's just—just make-believe, like the fairies and—and—" His voice broke and he threw the beard down, jumped off the stage and ran toward the exit.

Ruth called to him. "*Adam!* Come back here at once!"

"Let him go, Mommy." I looked ruefully out at our stunned and silent audience. "We've got something more important to do first."

I stepped forward and pulled off my Santa Claus hat. For a long moment I just stood there, trying to decide what to say. Even if I'd had my speech rehearsed, I don't think I could have talked around the lump in my throat.

I couldn't shake the feeling that somehow I had failed them. It was a feeling that went much deeper than my inability to cope with Adam-Two and his problem. It was a real, deep-down hollow feeling that stemmed from my conviction, ever since the Uncle's visit, that the whole idea of Fairyland was a mistake. I wanted to talk to each and every one of them, alone. I wanted to tell them, "It's going to be all right. Mommy and Daddy love you and will always look after you, so you mustn't worry."

And so I stood there on the stage in my ridiculous, padded Santa suit, and somehow managed a smile. "Kids," I said, "Daddy's sure sorry, but you see Santa Claus just couldn't make it today. He—his spaceship broke down—like our merry-go-round, remember? So Santa asked Daddy to sort of...to pretend—"

Down in the front row, nine-year old Molly-Five suddenly began to sob. Two rows behind her, thirteen-year old Mary-Three took up the cry. Then across the aisle from Mary, another girl wailed, "I want Santa Claus!" In the back of the Auditorium, fifteen-year old Johnny-Four shouted, "We hate you! You're a mean old Daddy!"

And there in the aisle, pointing an accusing finger at me, was thirty-eight-year old Mike One, who brought his Santa-problem to me—was it only three weeks ago? Mike-One, his arm extended, his chin trembling, yelling: "You lied to me! You lied, lied, lied!"

IT TOOK the better part of an hour to restore a semblance of order. When the first shock was over and the hysterical, contagious tears had subsided a little, Mommy and I managed to convince the Kids, at least most of them,

that Santa was alive and well, that he was very sorry he couldn't make it, but if they'd be good and not fuss about it they'd all get something extra special *next* Christmas. Just for good measure, we doubled the Ice Cream Ration for the next two weeks.

When it was over, I went looking for Adam-Two.

I was boiling mad, and I knew I ought to wait until I cooled off before having it out with him. But after what he'd pulled today, I didn't dare trust him out of my sight that long. I knew that my anger was irrational, but the knowledge didn't help much.

I found him behind the Picnic Grounds, throwing snowballs at the Great Wall. He was using the force field like a billiard cushion to bank his shots back in toward the trees.

He saw me coming and waited quietly, idly tossing a snowball from one hand to the other. For a moment I thought he might be going to heave it at me. But then he looked down at it, as if it were something he'd outgrown, and tossed it indifferently aside.

The expression on his face was not one of defiance, or arrogance—but neither was it that of a boy who was sorry

he'd been naughty. I guess it was a sort of waiting look.

"Well, son," I said, surprised that my anger had suddenly evaporated, "you sure messed things up, didn't you?"

"I guess I did, all right."

"You're not sorry?"

"I had to find out."

I nodded. "And you figure you *did* find out, is that it?"

"Yes."

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you that Santa just couldn't get here—that he asked me to pretend to be him so the Kids wouldn't be disappointed?"

He shook his head. "No, I wouldn't believe it."

For a moment the anger boiled up in me again and I wanted to grab him and shake him. I had a crazy notion that if I shook him hard enough I could shake him back into the mold, and make him once again just a Kid in Fairyland. Then everything would be all right...

I bent over and made a snowball and heaved it at the Wall, to give my hands something to do. My throw was too straight and the force field kicked it back at us. We both ducked as it whizzed over our heads, then grinned at each other.

"Come on over to Mommy and Daddy's House," I said.

"I want to talk to you."

We trudged along through the three-inch snow, down the path between the Circus Grounds and the dormitories. The Kids were drifting back from lunch, and I noticed the noise level was considerably lower than on any other Christmas I could remember. They hadn't completely recovered yet, and they probably wouldn't for a long time. I didn't know what to do about it except to sweat it out.

Ruth greeted us at the door. "Hello, Adam," she said. "Come on in."

"You're not angry with me?"

She shook her head. "We know you couldn't help yourself, don't we, Daddy?"

"I guess so," I said drily.

We went into the living room and I waved Adam to a seat. I stretched out in my favorite chair-lounge, feeling suddenly very old and very tired. Adam sat forward in his chair, watching me with that waiting look—defiant yet shy, courageous, yet a little afraid, resigned and yet hopeful...

"Adam," I said at last, "what are you trying to prove? What is it you want?"

He wet his lips and lowered his eyes for a moment. Then his gaze met mine without flinching. "It's like I told you

once before," he said quietly. "I just want to know the truth, the real truth about everything!"

I got to my feet and began to slowly pace the floor. I paused in front of Ruth's chair and looked down at her. She caught my hand, gave it a squeeze and nodded.

I turned back to Adam. "You won't like it," I said.

"Maybe not. But I gotta know. I just gotta!"

"Not 'gotta'," Ruth corrected automatically. "'Have to'."

"I have to know."

I paced three more laps, still hesitating. I felt like a surgeon, trying to decide whether or not to operate when it's a toss-up whether the operation will kill the patient or cure him.

"All right, Adam," I said wearily. "You win. But you have to promise me something. Promise me that you'll never say anything to the other Kids about what I'm going to tell you."

Now it was his turn to weigh a decision, and I could feel the battle going on behind those crystal-clear eyes. His innate honesty, battling with his insatiable curiosity. He considered for perhaps a full minute, then he nodded. "Okay. I don't think it's right not to tell Kids the truth—but I promise."

"Cross your heart?"

"Cross my heart."

I took a deep breath, signalled Ruth to make some coffee, and began.

"You were right about Santa Claus, Adam. He's just make-believe, and so are the fairies. Santa Claus was invented by Mommies and Daddies to represent the *spirit* of Christmas for kids too little to understand its real meaning. People on Earth still observe the holiday, although they've gradually forgotten what it really stands for. I'll explain that part to you later."

"What's Earth, Daddy?"

"Earth is where everybody lived before there were any spaceships. It's a big place, and some of it's nice and some of it not so nice. The people live in houses, something like this one, and the ones in a house are called families. There's a Mommy and a Daddy for each family, and their kids live in the house with them."

"Where do the kids come from?"

"From the Mommy. It's the same as what we call 'making a Dolly'."

"Oh."

I TALKED for six hours, until I was so hoarse my voice was cracking on every other word. He took it all in stride,

injecting a question here and there, absorbing it all like an unemotional sponge. But when I began to talk about war, he became a little upset. I explained how it had begun as individual struggles for survival or supremacy in the days of the cavemen, how it had evolved along with society into struggles between families and tribes, then nations, and now—between planets.

"But why do they *kill* each other, Daddy? That doesn't prove anything."

I laughed. "Son, if I could answer that one, I'd be Daddy Number One of the whole universe!"

WE FINALLY packed Adam off to bed in the spare room, after promising him we'd talk some more the next night. I'd shown him my library and told him he could come and read any time he liked, though of course he mustn't take any books out of the house where the Kids might see them.

Ruth and I stood on the front porch for awhile in the moonlight, gazing out over our once-peaceful little world.

"Harry, what will become of him?"

"I don't know.... He'll have to decide for himself. He became a man tonight, you know. I'd like him to stay,

but I imagine he'll want to go to Earth. He's got a mind that just won't stop. The best thing we can do is try to teach him the things he'll need to survive in that cock-eyed world, and turn him loose. It's no good trying to hand onto your kids once they're grown up, Mommy."

She shivered a little and moved closer to me. "I suppose you're right. I think I know now why mothers hate to see their children grow up."

I put my arm around her and gave her an affectionate squeeze. "He'll be all right.... You know, in a way I'm almost glad this happened. Maybe—just maybe—Adam has given us the answer. Maybe the thing to do is not to keep them Kids all their lives, but to let them grow up more slowly, in their own time instead of to some prescribed formula. The world has kept getting more complicated all the time, and a kid just can't grow up in it as easily as before."

When we were in bed, just before I put out the light, I said, "I guess I can answer your question now, Mommy. I *don't* still think these twenty years were wasted. If I had it to do over again, I'd still want to be Daddy of Fairyland."

CHAPTER V

THE NEXT morning at breakfast time I went upstairs and knocked on the door of Adam's room. He called to me to come in and I opened the door then stopped, one foot over the threshold.

Across the room, admiring his bewhiskered face in the mirror, was Santa Claus!

"Ho-ho-ho!" he boomed, in a perfect imitation of my own Santa-voice. "Merry Christmas, Daddy!" He tugged at the beard and there was the grinning face of Adam-Two. "I found it in the closet," he said. "Do I look the part?"

I laughed. "For a minute I thought you were the real thing."

He looked away. "I—I guess you know I'll want to go to Earth to live."

I nodded. "It will be pretty rough at first. You realize that?"

"Yes, I expect it will.... Daddy, I'm sorry I messed up Christmas for the Kids yesterday. I'd kind of like to make up for it by playing Santa for them today. Will you stand by me in case some smarty-pants tries to snatch my beard off?"

I grinned at him, but I didn't say anything because I discovered there was a strange kind of lump in my throat.

"I was thinking, too," he went on, "that maybe I could come back with the supply ship each Christmas and—and do the same thing, if you'd like me to."

I cleared my throat. "That—that would be fine, Adam."

He hesitated again, then blurted, "It isn't right, you know. Fairyland, I mean. It isn't fair to kids not to let them grow up. And it isn't the answer to all the things you told me are wrong about the world."

"I know, Adam. I know."

"Sooner or later— they'll realize that, on Earth."

"I think they already have," I said.

He scratched his chin under the beard. "Then some day they might decide to close Fairyland, mightn't they? So I was thinking, maybe each Christmastime you and Mommy could choose two or three of the older Kids and sort of get them ready for the world. The way you did me. Then I could take them back to Earth with me, and help them get started. You could tell the other Kids they went to live with Santa Claus."

I stared at him in amazement. This—this Kid, I couldn't think of him any other way—yesterday had been little more than a juvenile delinquent. Today he was a mature, thinking adult who

in a few sparse words had provided the answer to the question that had been gnawing at me for two weeks: what was to become of Fairyland?

I felt the way a father must feel when he suddenly realizes his boy has grown up, and has turned out all right. Kind of proud, and more than

a little grateful.

I gripped Adam's hand. "Son, you've got yourself a deal! Come along and let's surprise the Kids!"

We went down the stairs arm in arm, and I called to Ruth: "Hey, Mommy! Guess what. There really is a Santa Claus, after all!"



TALES FOR TOMORROW

In "Feedback" this issue a reader expresses doubts about our being able to find enough good material to fill an issue of INFINITY every month. Since this is our first monthly issue, we can't really point to it as proof that he's wrong; but the proof will be coming along on schedule from now on.

One way of finding good material is finding good new writers. This may involve a little more work than just sitting back and depending on the "Big Names"—but the results can be well worth it.

In this issue, you'll find three relatively or totally unfamiliar names, all with excellent stories. In the next, you'll find at least one more. But what makes Webber Martin a very rare example indeed is that his first story to be published anywhere will be a complete, feature short novel!

Yes, next issue you'll meet "Spacerogue," a story which ignores taboos and introduces one of the most memorable characters ever to appear in science fiction. We refuse to describe the plot here, or give even a hint of the smashing climax; but after you've read it we're sure you'll agree that Webber Martin is one of the freshest young talents to hit the field in a long, long time. Don't take our word for it—read it and see!

And, if any of you are dubious about new writers, there will be plenty of established "Big Names" on hand, too: Randall Garrett and Robert Silverberg, to name two we're sure of. Be on hand; it looks like a bang-up issue.

Infinity's Choice



by ROBERT SILVERBERG

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE, by James Blish. Ballantine, 35¢.

This complex, fascinating, uneven, difficult book is probably the most adult novel yet to appear in this era of "adult" science fiction. It is adult in the sense that Blish has made no concessions to his readers' intelligence, or lack thereof, in writing the book; only a reader who can see the power and excitement inherent in an abstract theological argument is apt to enjoy this book. Others are likely to regard it as a thundering bore. The kind of reader who finds the writings of, say, Aquinas or Kierkegaard stimulating and challenging will find much to admire and relish in *A Case of Conscience*—but such readers are in a minority, and admirers of Blish's new book will probably be likewise.

Like most of Blish's recent novels, this is reworked from an earlier magazine story, the novelet of the same title that appeared in *If* in 1954 when it was under the editorship of Larry Shaw. Blish has retained the original 25,000-

word story virtually intact, with the insertion of minor new plot elements here and there to foreshadow the second half of the book; that second half, actually much longer than the first, is completely new.

On the action level, remarkably little happens. A commission of four Earthmen is sent, about the year 2050, to study the planet Lithia, 50 light-years from Sol and inhabited by intelligent reptilian beings. The job of the four-man commission is to evaluate the planet, Lithia, and recommend the sort of relationship Earth should attempt to establish with it. But after an elaborate argument the commission reports itself deadlocked and unable to reach a decision; it returns to Earth, bearing a gift from the Lithians, an unborn member of their species.

Earth is largely a troglodytic world, thanks to the rush to build bomb-shelters in the 1960's, and it is in this unhappy culture that the young Lithian is reared. He develops none of the calm rationality of his forebears, and becomes

rather a demonic figure who swiftly causes the ruin of the shelter world, and whose activities lead to a climax that quite literally comes with the impact of a thermonuclear weapon.

So much for the action chart. The real conflict of the book is on a subtler level, told through the viewpoint of the Jesuit biologist Ramon Ruiz-Sanchez, a member of the Lithia commission. The Jesuit, in studying the Lithians, is led to believe that the perfection of their way of life stems from a sending of the Devil—and from there he deviates into the ancient and beguiling heresy of Manichaeism, which maintained the independent strength of the Adversary.

The core of Blish's novel is the conflict within Father Ruiz-Sanchez, and its ultimate spectacular resolution. That such a plot element could serve as the basis for an entire sf novel—or even a short story—would have been incomprehensible twenty or ten years ago. Even today it is a distinctly uncommercial concept, and it's hard to see hundreds of thousands of paperback novel-readers deriving much satisfaction from *A Case of Conscience*; the book will simply be over many heads.

It is not a complete success. The five-year gap between the

writing of Parts One and Two causes a sharp discontinuity in tone that many may find jarring. The earlier segment is leisurely, discursive, almost talky; the pace of the latter is much more frenzied, even including a well-handled Besteresque cocktail-party in a decadent countess' home.

Characterization, which is almost at a minimum in the abstruse 30,000-word prologue that is Part One, becomes far deeper in the new section, though we never really learn much of the past history of Blish's protagonists. And typical of Blish's work is the fondness for tangential references to contemporary culture—references to *Finnegans Wake*, Ezra Pound, Colin Wilson, and others; these are fun for those in the know, annoyingly obscure to the rest. I chuckled over the choice of Hadrian VIII as the name for the Pope (a sly reference on Blish's part to a book by Frederic Rolfe, *Hadrian the Seventh*) but other references troubled me. And it seems unlikely that 21st Century intellectuals will refer as frequently as they do here to Colin Wilson, whose much-heralded book is already sinking into a deserved obscurity two years after its publication.

But these are minor quibbles. In *A Case of Conscience* Blish has written that rarest

of books, the intellectually exciting science-fiction novel. *Captain Future* fans take heed, and purchase only at your own risk. This book will give your mind a workout.

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YONDER, By Charles Beaumont. Bantam, 35¢.

Charles Beaumont is a West Coast writer who first popped up in the science fiction magazines five or six years ago, graduated quickly to the slicks, and who has been cashing thousand-dollar checks from the likes of *Playboy* and *Esquire* for the past several years.

One sample of Beaumont's usual *Playboy* wares is included, for some reason, in this new Bantam collection—a wholly mechanical bit of dreary pornography called "You Can't Have Them All." Three of the other items are published for the first time here; the rest come from the orthodox sf magazines (three from *If*, three from *Orbit*, one from *Imagination*, one from *Infinity*, and three from *Fantasy and Science Fiction*. In addition, one item appeared both in *Playboy* and *F&SF*.) By and large, most of the sixteen items seem to have been chosen to give the impression that Beaumont is an overpublicized, overpaid, and talentless writer. Actually, he's

a writer who is talented to excess, the victim of his own abilities.

Most of the stories in *Yonder* are, intentionally and otherwise, derivative in some fashion. We have imitation Bradbury ("Place of Meeting"); ersatz James Joyce ("A World of Differents"); synthetic John Collier ("Mother's Day"). One ("The Last Caper") is, extraordinarily enough, a simultaneous parody of Mickey Spillane and Ray Bradbury. Another ("Last Rites") might have been written by Clifford D. Simak. These derivative stories are all well done—but much of their virtue is second-hand.

Much fuss—has been made over the pyrotechnics of Beaumont's style, which relies heavily on one-sentence paragraphs and Bradburian descriptive excess, and whose characteristic tone is a kind of high-pitched scream. But the style seems to shift with each borrowed theme in the stories mentioned above.

Along with them come a few others which grow out of the peculiar mores of Los Angeles—the funny but overlong "Quadriopticon," the unfunny and overlong "Anthem," and "The Monster Show." Others, like "Traumerei" and "The New Sound," are merely inconsequential fillers.

But yet one living, quivering story right in the middle of all this pretentious clap-trap and pastiche bears witness to the fact that Beaumont *can* write, and write superbly: "The Jungle," a chilling fantasy of the conflict between tomorrow's chrome-steel civilization and the older world of the supernatural. The much-heralded "The Beautiful People" is nothing but a standard anti-utopia yarn; but in "The Jungle," Beaumont is neither dishing up old-hat stuff nor donning gaudy Hollywood masks, and it seems to me that this is the one honest and successful story of the lot. The rest is tinsel and trickery, most of it first-class as tinsel and trickery goes. Only one story of this batch strikes home; the rest is just show-off stuff. In small doses, it goes down fine—but 70,000 words of glittering empty confections is a bit too much.

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DEADLY IMAGE, by Edmund Cooper. Ballantine Books, 35¢.

For some reason British writers seem inordinately fond of this plot: a man from the twentieth century reaches the future, via suspended animation or outright time travel, and finds his remote descendants in a state of decadence, usually with android or

robot servants to grease the skids, and with an underground of grumbling malcontents who eventually enlist the hero's aid in changing society.

At least a dozen British writers have employed this setup—Peter Martin's *Summer in Three Thousand* and Meaburn Staniland's *Back to the Future* are typical examples—and now Edmund Cooper, whose only previous appearances in American magazines have been a few adequate novelets in *Fantastic Universe* and (I believe) a couple of stories in the slicks, has come up with the same well-worn story, which Ballantine presents as if no one had ever written it before.

Briefly: John Markham, a twentieth-century Englishman, is accidentally entombed in an underground bomb-shelter, and spends a hundred forty-six years in suspended animation, awakening finally in A.D. 2113.

This is a post-atomic world (the inhabitants quaintly refer to the atomic war of 1967 as the Nine Days Tranquilizer). Androids do all the work; the relatively few human beings live a life of idleness and sexual abandon. Markham is caught up in this society, drifts in and out of contact with various members of it, has a couple of romantic interludes, and, inevitably,

is contacted by the underground movement that wants to revolt against the Futility Of It All. The underground elects Markham leader, and in a slam-bang finale the androids are repulsed and human initiative is saved.

If this summary makes the book sound stale and familiar, it's for good reason: this is a terribly predictable book. The one fresh and genuine thing in it is the development of the relationship between Markham and his personal android, Marion-A; a relationship that is not quite one of love, and which in its own way is quite fascinating, until the plot-

dictated resolution at the end ruins it all. The rest of the book is just another future utopia story, neither much better nor much worse than a dozen others.

The writing ranges from the compellingly vivid (as in the impressionistic first chapter) to the flat and synoptic; the plotting is episodic for the most part, the characters well realized but chiefly stock models. It's not a bad book at all, merely a derivative and routine one. We may yet see first-class science fiction from Edmund Cooper once he's finished exploring old and standard themes.

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SCIENCE THRU SCIENCE FICTION

(Continued from page 4)

News (which the committee sent me in the form of a photostat):

"Science fiction, much maligned by conservative science, has found a supporter in a Johns Hopkins University educator.

"John H. Woodburn of Baltimore told a science teachers conference that science fiction stimulates the youngster's imagination and adds meaning to cold, hard scientific facts.

"Woodburn said it was quite likely many of our present-day scientists became in-

terested in the field because their curiosity was aroused by reading science fiction."

Greybearded iconoclasts in the audience will please note that Woodburn didn't say that you can get a scientific education by reading science fiction, as Hugo Gernsback once fondly hoped. The point he makes is quite different, and I think perfectly valid.

The "Science thru Science Fiction" committee has what seems to me to be a splendid idea. If you attend a school of any kind, and enjoy reading sf, I suggest you contact them immediately.—LTS

INFILTRATION INFILTRATION INFILTRATION INFILTRATION INFILTRATION

If werewolves exist, they don't necessarily conform to all the superstitions people have. They may even know fear....

By ALGIS BUDRYS

I

SUNSET. *They're coming for me, tonight*, he knew as he woke.

Sunset. Not really—if he were to get dressed, now, and go out on the street, the red globe would still be hanging over the cliffs of New Jersey. But the shadow of the building next door had fallen over his apartment windows, and he sleepily pushed a cigarette between his numb lips and swung his feet over the side

of the bed, fumbling with a match as he walked over to the small radio on the windowsill and turned it on. There was a double-header between the Giants and Cincinnati—the first game was probably in its last inning.

Sunset—odd, how the conditioning worked. Was it conditioning? Or were the old wives' tales not so absurd, after all? But he *could* go out in the sunlight—had done it many times. His tan proved it. He touched silver and cold

iron countless times each day, crossed running water—and he'd gone to church every Sunday, until he was twelve. No, there was a core of truth under the fantastically complex shell of nonsense, but the old limitations were not part of it. He shrugged. Neither were most of the powers.

Still, he liked to sleep in the daytime. His schedule seemed to gain an hour at night, lose one in the morning, until, almost unnoticeably, it had slipped around the clock.

He went into the bathroom while the worn tubes in the radio warmed up slowly, and washed his face, brushed his teeth, shaved. He combed his hair, then paused thoughtfully. Wouldn't do any harm. *No full moon in here, either*, he thought, looking up at the circular fluorescent tube in the ceiling, but he noticed no impediment as he coalesced, dropped to all fours, and ran his pelt against the curry-combs he had screwed to the bathroom door. He did a thorough job, enjoying it, and, after he had realigned, walked out of the bathroom in time to hear the Giants making their final, fruitless out of the first game. Five-Zero, Cincinnati, and he grimaced in disgust. Four shut-outs in

the last five games.

He laughed at himself, then, for actually being annoyed. Still and all, it wasn't the first time a man became emotionally involved in a mirage.

Was it a mirage? True, there weren't really any such things as the San Francisco Giants—but a man could certainly be expected to forget that, occasionally, if he were part of the same illusion at least half the time. And certainly, such stuff as dreams are made of is solid enough when you are yourself a dream.

He went out in the kitchen and started coffee, then came back and sat down next to the radio, hardly listening to the recap of the game.

ODD, how it had all started. Being suddenly marooned on this planet, forced to survive, somehow, through the long years while waiting for rescue. How many years had it been, now? Some five hundred thousand, in the subjective reference for this particular universe. He knew the formula for conversion into objective time—it all worked out to the equivalent of about six months—but that wasn't what mattered, as long as they'd all had to survive in *this* universe.

Sleep—suspended animation, if you wanted to call it

that—had been the only answer. And they couldn't do *that*, directly. They'd had to resort to chrysalids.

He smiled to himself, got up, and turned down the fire under the pot until the coffee was percolating softly.

The original plan had snowballed, somewhat.

Resolving chrysalids was one thing—making them eternal was another, and unnecessary. It was far simpler to arrange the chrysalids so they'd be able to reproduce themselves. And, of course, in order to survive, and take care of itself, a chrysalis had to have some independent intelligence.

And, so it worked. The chrysalis housed a sleeper, operating unawares and completely independent of him—or her—until the chrysalis wore out. Then the sleeper was passed on to a new chrysalis, with neither of the chrysalids involved—nor, for that matter, the sleeper—conscious of the transfer. So it would continue, through the weary, subjective years; generation upon generation of chrysalids, until, finally, the paramathematical path drifted back to touch this universe, and the sleepers could wake, and continue their journey.

And if the human race chose to speculate on its ori-

gins in the meantime, well, that was part of the snowball.

He got up again, and turned off the flame under the coffee-pot. *Now, if I were a sorcerer—as defined by Cotton Mather's ilk, of course—*, he thought, *I should be able to (a) turn the fire off without getting up, or, (b) generate the flame without the use of Con Edison's gas, or, (c), if I had any self-respect at all, conjure hot coffee out of thin air.* His lips twisted with nausea as he thought that nine out of ten people would expect him to be drinking blood, as a matter of course.

He sighed with some bitterness, but more of resignation. Well, that was just another part of the snowball.

Because the chrysalids had done a magnificent job in all three of its subdivisions. They had kept the sleepers safe—and reproduced, and used their intelligence to survive. They had survived in spite of pestilence, famine, and flood—by learning enough to wipe out the first two, and control the third. It would seem that progress was not a special quality to be specially desired. Most of the chrysalids were consumed by a fierce longing for the Good Old Days, as a matter of fact. It was merely the inescapable

accretion to sheer survival.

And so came civilization. With civilization: recreation. In short, the San Francisco Giants, and— He reached over, suddenly irritated at the raspy-voiced and slightly frantic recapitulation of the lost ballgame, and changed the station. And Beethoven.

He relaxed, smiling slightly at himself once again, and let the music sing to him. Chrysalids, eh? Well, they certainly weren't his kind of life, free to swing from star to star, riding the great flux of Creation from universe to universe. But whence Beethoven? Whence Rembrandt, Da Vinci, and Will Shakespeare, hunched over a mug of ale and dashing off genius on demand, with half an eye on the serving wench?

He shook his head. What would happen to this people, when the sleepers woke?

The snowball. Ah, yes, the snowball. That was a good part of it—and he and his kind were another.

If we had known, he thought. If we had known how it would be...

But, they hadn't known. It had been just a petty argument, at first. Nobody knew, now, who had started it. But there were two well-defined sides, now, and he was an Insurgent, for some reason. The

winning side gives the names that stick. They were Watchers—an honorable name, a name to conjure up trust, and duty, and loyalty. And he was an Insurgent. Well, let it stand. Accept the heritage of dishonor and hatred. Somewhere, sometime, a gage was flung, and he was heir to the challenge.

The chrysalids solved the problem of survival, of course. But the problem of rescue had remained. For rescue, in the sense of help from an outside agency, would be disastrous. When the path shifted back, they had to learn of it themselves, and go on of their own accord—or go into slavery. For there is one currency that outlives document and token. Personal obligation. And, if they were so unlucky as to have an actual rescuer, the obligation would be high—prohibitively so.

The solution had seemed simple, at first. In each generation of chrysalids, there would be one aware individual—one Watcher, to keep guard, and to waken the rest should the path drift back in the lifetime of his chrysalis. Then, when that particular chrysalis wore out, the Watcher would be free to return to sleep, while another took his place.

His mouth twisted to one

side as he took a sip of coffee.

A simple, workable plan—until someone had asked, "Well and good. Excellent. And what if this high-minded Watcher realizes that we, asleep, are all in his power? What if he makes some agreement with a rescuer, or, worse still, decides to *become* our rescuer when the path drifts back? What's to prevent him, eh? No," that long-forgotten, wary individual had said, "I think we'd best set some watchers to watch the Watcher."

Quis custodiet?

What had it been like? He had no way of knowing, for he had no memory of his exact identity. That would come only with Awakening. He had only a knowledge of his heritage. For all he knew, it had been he who raised the fatal doubt—or, had been the first delegated Watcher. He shrugged. It made no difference. He was an Insurgent now.

But he could imagine the voiceless babel among their millions—the argument, the cold suspicion, the pettiness. Perhaps he was passing scornful judgment on himself, he realized. What of it? He'd earned it.

So, finally, two groups. One content to be trustful. And

the other a fitful, restless clan, awakening sporadically, trusting to chance alone, which, by its laws, would insure that many of them were awake when the path drifted back. The Insurgents.

So, as well, two basic kinds of chrysalids. The human kind, and the others. Wolves, bears, tigers. Bats, seals—every kind of living thing, except the human. The Insurgent kind.

And so the struggle began. It was a natural outgrowth of the fundamental conflict. Which side had tried to overpower the first chrysalis? *Who first enslaved another man?* he thought, and half-smarled.

That, too, was unimportant now. For the seed had been planted. The thought was there. *Those who are awake can place those who sleep under obligation.* Control the chrysalids, and you control the sleepers within. But chrysalids endure for one generation, and then the sleepers pass on.

What then? Simplicity. Group your chrysalids. Segregate them. Set up pens for them, mark them off, and do it so the walls and fences endure through long years.

This is my country. All men are brothers, but stay on your side of the line, brother.

Sorry, brother—you've got a funny shape to your nose. You just go live in that nice, walled-off part of my city, huh, brother?

Be a good fellow, brother. Just move to the back of the bus, or I'll lynch you, brother.

And the chrysalis die, the sleepers transfer—into another chrysalis in the same pen. *SPQR. Vive, Napoleon! Sieg Heil!*

SOME of the time it was the Watchers. Some of the time it was the Insurgents. And some of the time, of course, the chrysalids evolved their own leaders, and imitated. For, once the thing had begun, it could not be stopped. The organization was always more powerful than the scattered handful. So, the only protection against organization was organization.

But it was not organization in itself that was the worst of it. It was the fact that the only way to control the other side's penned chrysalids was to break down a wall in the pen, or to build a larger pen including many of the smaller ones.

And, again, it was too late, now, to decide who had been at fault.

Who first invented War?

The way to survive war is to wage more decisive war.

The chrysalids had to survive. They learned. They...progressed?...by so doing. They progressed from bows to ballistas to bombs. From arbalists to aircraft to A-bombs. Phosphorus. Chlorine. HE. Fragmentation. Napalm. Dust, and bacteriological warfare. Thermopylae, Crecy, the Battle of Britain, Korea, Indo-China, Indonesia.

And try to believe as you sit here, Insurgent, that none of this is real, that it is all a phase, acted out by dolls of your own creation in a sham battle that is really only a bad dream in the unfamiliar bed of a lodging for the night!

Chrysalids they might be, Insurgent, he lashed himself, but it was the greed and suspicion of all your kind—Insurgent and Watcher alike—that set this juggernaut to rolling!

He took another sip of coffee, and almost gagged as he realized it had grown cold. He got up and walked into the kitchen with the cup in his hand. He threw the rest of the coffee in the sink, washed out the cup, and turned on the burner under the coffeepot.

One more thing—one more development, born of suspicion.

For the original one-Watcher plan had been abandoned,

of course. And here, again, there was no telling whose blame it was. *Quis custodiet ipsos custodies?* Who will watch the Watchers? There had been many Watchers to a generation—how many, no one knew. They balanced each other off, and they checked the random number of Insurgents who awoke in each generation. So, more Insurgents awoke to check the Watchers—and, more.

In spite of what the Transylvanians believed, a wolf is no match for a man, except under special conditions. A tiger can pull a man down—but cannot fire back at the hunters. A seal is prey to the Eskimo.

So, "werewolves." Child of fear, of Watcher propaganda, and of one-tenth fact. The animals were Insurgent chrysalids, right enough. But, for an awake Insurgent to compete with a Watcher, the Insurgent, too, had to be a man—or something like it.

The coffee had warmed up. He poured himself a fresh cup, and added cream and sugar absently. The refrigerator was empty. He reached in and turned it off. No more need for that, after tonight.

So, that was the power the Insurgents had. The only power, and the Watchers had it, as well. They could resolve

their chrysalids into any form they chose—realign. A wolf could become a man—*without* hair on his palm, and *with* garlic on his breath, if he so chose. A man—a Watcher, of course—could become a wolf.

Thus, the final development. Espionage and counter-espionage. Infiltration. Spying, if you chose.

The Insurgent smiled bitterly, and drained the cup. And propaganda, of course. Subtle—most of it indirect, a good deal of it developed by the chrysalids themselves, but propaganda, nevertheless. Kill the evil ones—kill the eaters of dead flesh, the drinkers of blood. They are the servants of the Evil One.

He almost retched.

But, you could hardly blame them. It was a war, and, in a war, you play all your cards, even if some of them were forced into your hand.

Yes, and I've played genuine werewolf on occasion, when I had to.

He started to wash the coffee-pot and the cup—then, threw both into the garbage can. He walked back to the radio and dialed it away from Eroica and back to baseball. The Giants were losing, Three-Zero, in the third inning.

The house phone buzzed. He went to it slowly, picked

it calmly off the hook.

"Yes, Artie?"

"Mister Disbrough, there's a couple of guys coming up to see you. I'm not supposed to tell you about it, but... Well, I figured..." the doorman said.

"All right. Thanks, Artie," he answered quietly. He almost hung up, then thought of something. "Artie?"

"Yes, Mister Disbrough?"

"There'll be a couple of fifths of Dewar's in my cupboard. I won't be back for a while. You and Pete are welcome to them. And thanks again."

He hung up and began to dress, realigning his chrysalis to give him the appearance of clothing. The doorbell rang, and he went to open it for the two men from the FBI.

II

WHAT DIFFERENCE did it make, what particular pen he represented? Rather, since the sober-faced men knew very well which pen it was, why should it be so necessary to them for him to confirm what they already knew without a shadow of a doubt?

"Now, then, Mister Disbrough," one of the FBI men said, leaning his hands on the edge of the table at which the

Insurgent was sitting, "we know who sent you."

Good. Why bother me, then?

"We know where you got your passport, we know who met you at the dock, we know your contacts. We have photographs of everyone you've met and talked to, we have tapes of every telephone call you've made or received. We also know that you are the top man in your organization here."

And? They were chrysalids, every one of them. Perhaps there was no Watcher behind them—perhaps. But he'd been picked up a little too quickly. The net had folded itself around him too soon. No—there had to be a Watcher. He wished they'd stop this talking and bring him out.

"Now, I'd simply like to point out to you that this is an airtight case. No lawyer in the world will be able to break it down. You'll retain counsel, of course. But, I'd simply like to point out to you that there'll be no point to any denial you may make to us. We *know* what you've been doing. I'd suggest you save your defense for the trial."

He looked up at him and smiled ruefully. "If you've got a list of charges," he said, "I'll be glad to confess to all

of them—provided, of course, that it is a complete list.”

I'm sure it doesn't list me as a werewolf, he thought. I wonder what the sentence would be—death by firing squad equipped with silver bullets?

But, then, he wasn't going to confess to that, anyway.

“Um!” The FBI man looked suspicious. Obviously, he'd expected nothing of the kind.

“No strings,” the Insurgent reassured him. “The job's over, and it's time to punch the clock.”

Which was just about the way it was. But he wanted that Watcher. If he was in the office at all, he'd almost have to come out to witness the confession. After all, the Insurgent was supposed to be a pretty big fish.

The FBI man went into a cubicle office set off to one side. When he came out, carrying a sheaf of paper, the Watcher was with him.

The Insurgent felt the hackles standing up on the back of his neck, and something rumbled inaudibly at the base of his throat. He knew. He could tell. He could smell Watcher every step of the way, from the day he had docked until now, when the scent—half there, half the pure intuition of instinct—rose up before him in an over-

powering wave.

Then he saw the look of distaste crawl across the Watcher's face, and he barked a laugh that drew curious looks from the men in the office. *Hello, brother.*

He saw the bulge of the hip holster on the Watcher's belt, and laughed again. So, we play the game, he thought. *We add up scores, and, in the end, the side with the most points wins. Forget that there should be no sides, that every point, no matter for whom scored, is a mark of shame and disgrace.*

He wondered, briefly, whether the Watcher was of his kind by choice, or whether it was simply something that had happened, as it was with him. Probably. Two separate heritages had met, represented by identical individuals who happened to have awakened in dissimilar chrysalids.

Will we remember? he wondered. *When we awaken, will we remember this? How we battled, blinded, in the shadows of our own casting? Or was there more mercy in Creation than they, themselves, had shown to the chrysalids? He had three brothers among the sleepers. When they woke, would they embrace, not remembering that each had killed the other countless*

times? Or forgetting that they had stood together, on some battlefield? Would all the old comrades, all the bitter enemies, be wiped from memory? He hoped so. With every segment of his being, he hoped so, for there was no peace, through eternity, if it was otherwise.

He stood up, lightly, tensing the muscles in his calves. The FBI men, suddenly alert, began to move for him, but he'd maneuvered things so that none of them were close enough to him.

The Watcher went pale.

"Shall I coalesce, brother?" the Insurgent asked, the words rumbling out of his throat, a grin of derision baring his teeth.

"No!" The Watcher was completely frightened. Words could be explained away, particularly if they sounded like nonsense to the other men in the room. But a werewolf, fanging the throat of a Watcher who would have to fight back with *his* spectacular weapons... Nothing in the world could keep the rumors

from spreading. The chrysalids might even learn, finally and irrevocably, the origin of their species.

"Your obligation, brother," the Insurgent half-laughed, and kept stalking toward the Watcher. *Perhaps he is my brother.*

And if he is...?

No difference. The shadows are thick and very dark. One of the other men shot him in the side, but he sprang for the Watcher, carefully human, to hold the Watcher to his debt, and the Watcher shot him three times in the chest, once in the throat, and once in the stomach.

The shape of a cross? Did he believe it himself? Was it true? A plus sign, cancelling a negative force? Who knew? Shadow, shadow, all is darkness.

He fell to his knees, coughing, in victory. Score one more for the Insurgents, and a Watcher, at that!

"Thank you, brother," the Insurgent murmured, and fell into the long sleep with a grateful sigh.

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REMEMBER!

INFINITY is now monthly!

Don't miss the next great issue!

Feedback



By the Readers

A COUPLE of things in the present issue prompt me to make myself heard once more (the issue being the June number).

First, I was very happy about your and knight's Infinity Awards. No quibbling whatsoever, for the first time in 17 issues. (Whoops—16, Knight wasn't around for one of them, when you went 6-weekly.) I was especially pleased to see that you had better luck than the International Fantasy Award people, since your awards are listed prominently in the latest issue of *Publishers Weekly*. (Did you also notice what they said about Heinlein's book? Perhaps someone at *PW* read knight's column this time?)

Second, the return to bi-monthly is unfortunate, but with the amount of good fiction coming out, it is advisable. You've been publishing too many klinkers like "Pangborn's Paradox" to make me believe that you could come out every month with a good issue. I also welcome the re-

spite from serials that the reduced schedule will bring. It's only when someone like Russell or Clement or Heinlein has one going that I am for it. Wilson's short novel was all right, but not really worth the space devoted to it.

Third, about the "Favorite Novel Poll." Double-quotes is right, for I fully contest the right of four of the top ten to be eligible in a list of novels: *The Martian Chronicles*, which *no one* of the over 100 persons I know that have read the book even remotely calls a novel; *City*, which is only a novel because Marty Greenberg calls it such, but really is a collection of short stories; *Foundation*, which is a collection of four novelettes; and *Foundation and Empire*, which is made up of two unrelated short novels. It's like calling Heinlein's *Man Who Sold the Moon* a novel! Also, I have my doubts as to whether *Fahrenheit 451* qualifies, since the title story is a short novel, and the book contains two other stories. On the other hand, where on Earth was

Mirror for Observers? I don't believe that any informed reader would leave this IFA winner off their list. All the critics from knight through Miller to Boucher have repeatedly given it rave reviews. All those whom I know that have read it consider it one of the best pieces of science fiction they know of. Also, if you include *Slan*, why not *Brave New World*, which isn't much older?

Oh well, I won't quibble further. The cover, though, wasn't much. Why must all of Emsh's men and women look exactly the same? Rate interiors so: Bowman, Emsh—big gap—Martinez, Kluga. No Schoenherr, despite the contents page.—Roland Hirsch, 319 Noah Hall, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio.

I LIKE that "Magazine of Tomorrowness" on the side, and, as a matter of fact, it has sold three copies of INFINITY by persuading friends of mine to buy it.

But that seems almost counteracted by that "Russia in Space!" thing. Echhh! The story was good, very good, but the cover blurb...

Silverberg's serial was probably the best thing in this issue, aside from damon knight's column, which is always the first thing I turn to.

"Pangborn's Paradox" was good, but by the time I reached the end of p. 105, I knew exactly how it would come out. I gave my opinion on Anderson's story. And, come to think of it, the only things I didn't like were p. 5 and the back cover.

On the awards: as far as I can see, all the judging was done by knight; I would much rather see a poll of readers. My choices would have been the same on the short and science books; on the novel, I would have substituted *Door Into Summer*, and for the special award, I think that Marty Greenberg's *Coming Attractions* should win hands down. I take it that the "Special Award of Merit" does not have to be for a novella collection. (*There may not even be a Special Award every year—only when there's something outstanding that fits into no regular category.—LTS*) And, by all means, let's have an award for anthologies (although there were only about three last year).—Mike Becker, 2216 Massachusetts Ave., N. W., Washington 8, D. C.

60

I THOUGHT perhaps you might be interested in hearing the reactions of a person who, never having ventured into the world of science fiction,

took the initial step today and purchased the June issue of INFINITY SCIENCE FICTION.

It has been exactly 6½ hours since I purchased my copy of INFINITY SCIENCE FICTION and I have read the book from stem to stern (or from front to back, whichever way you like it), and I must say that I enjoyed most of it immensely. The first part of Robert Silverberg's serial, "Recalled to Life," completely absorbed me, and I found myself terribly annoyed when it had to be stopped at such a crucial point—very disturbing! I also enjoyed "Pangborn's Paradox," although not so much as Silverberg's story. The rest of the stories, I am afraid, I did not care for very much. In my humble, unschooled and unlearned opinion (and I mean every word of that), I think that they were very poorly written.

As for the cover—well, it's a cover. I guess even science fiction needs to use sex appeal.

All in all, dear Mr. Editor, I would like to thank you for a very delightful 6½ hours of reading. I am looking forward to the next issue of INFINITY SCIENCE FICTION.—Teresa R. Kraemer, 15 Waverly Place, Box 165, Montvale, New Jersey.

P. S. I have a couple of

ideas for a science fiction story. Interested?

(I'm always interested in stories, but established sf writers are rarely at a loss for ideas. The obvious answer: write the stories; I'll be glad to read them and judge them on an equal basis with all other manuscripts. And I hope you'll continue to read sf, in any case.—LTS)

∞

BOTHER!

I had just been challenged and excited by "Slice of Life." I had just been hilariously entertained by "A Pound of Prevention." I was just thinking what a good 35¢ worth and more I had gotten with the April INFINITY. And then the whole thing was ruined by Richard Smith's stupid story "The Beast of Boredom."

You can get away with a lot if you're dealing with alien psychology. How the residents of Tau Ceti III react to the woes and burdens of life is material for speculation. But human psychology, full of holes in its knowledge as it is, does contain a few constant referents.

So howcum hero Harry Ogden is so blithering an idiot? And howcum you print this story?

Now, friends, I have here a very clever man. He is not the

most brilliant man in the world. Our first look at him, though, shows him carefully creeping up on a shack, making profound observations on the old "war is hell" theme. He is also clever enough to use his 10-minute time cycle to work out a planned program of entertainment involving the girl in the next apartment. He is also clever enough to manage to smuggle in a good-sized hunk of bejewelled contraband. He is ungreedy enough to be sorry, when he finds out what a mess he's in.

But, friends, this same clever man is too moronic to throw the damn thing away. The terms of reference in the story make it obvious that the mystic globe only works on those around it. There's a fourteenth floor window; there's probably a beautifully adequate incinerator chute; there's probably an imbecilic, greedy janitor to be trapped at the other end of said chute. Any ordinary man—and Harry is apparently ordinary—would have pitched that Trojan Horse globe so soon as he caught on, or as soon as he got tired of playing footsie with Mary Jeffers, over in 1403. But Smith won't let him do it.

For my money, if a human character can't be free to do what a normal human character would do in a standard situation (such as in trouble

because of a globe, a monster, or a large stack of mail on the desk—there *is* enough of the standard here), then the story is weak. You see a ten-legged glorx coming across the desert sands of Mars, and you can do anything that comes to mind, depending upon your reaction to ten-legged glorxae. You see a nasty, bothersome thing on the desk which is causing misery, grief, pain, and is shaped like a lumpy baseball—and you pitch it! What else?

Besides, there are better time-problem stories around than this chestnut.

Like before, bother! ("Leg. Forst." was good. More Simak, less Smith! until Smith learns to treat his characters legitimately.)—Kenneth R. Mitchell.

(Man, are you wide open! Now, let's see which reader has the sharpest axe.—LTS)

∞

A COUPLE more editorials like the one in the June issue of INFINITY will make your soup go well with ye olde Early Times. Honestly, you read like you got a RX from your wife's doctor for a new mink coat. You did sound quite human tho and I hope that you've bounced back feeling fit to finance the fur.

Sf has been a source of entertainment for me since

eight years of age; I've read and enjoyed many short stories but not when there was a decent novel around. I heartily dislike serials and usually avoid buying a mag which contains one. Frankly, my copy of the June issue would now be in someone else's file had I noticed.

Mr. Stone made a derogatory remark about the type of lad who reads the girly books comparing the character with the average sf fan. In all seriousness I disagree with the man. True, most of that junk

is literary fffft but I contend that the man with the type of personality who most thoroughly enjoys a well written science fiction story is the same person who, in a lighter mood, enjoys the tease of a torrid tale. The restless creativeness of an intelligence who seeks an energy outlet in sf imagination takes equal pleasure in more earthly imaginings.

Mr. Shaw, there is nothing more certain than uncertainty and yet—if I were you—I'd scatter a couple of copy cuties



"Say, that doesn't look like Idlewild!"

around the corner confectioners to survey the situation: tell them to ask the dealers what other kind of mag the sf buyer pays for on the way out.

It is easy to quote a jillion factual examples that indicates sex and science are a solid sonnet; I've seen it in mag stores, but it is your problem to peddle the pulp and I'd be poorly paid to push the proposal. (Pardon?)

Oh well, to me it is so obvious that I'm half-willing to concede that my contention has already been disproven but, if you care to discuss it with me, please do not hand me a line about lowering the literary standards, etc., etc. in that vein.

Say, do you know what's with Richard Shaver these days?—Steve Rasmussen, 3727 N. Milwaukee, Chicago 41, Ill.

(Copy cuties are a luxury I can't afford, but your theory deserves further research. Any of you readers care to write in and tell us what other kinds of magazines you read besides sf? And for Richard Shaver, I imagine the nearest flying saucer magazine would be your best bet.—LTS)

∞

FINISHED the June issue of INFINITY. What an enjoyable reading. Novel, novelette and stories were gems of

space adventure and intrigue. "Recalled to Life" and "The High Ones" were thrillers.

Now to wait a couple of months to learn how Harker fared out in "Recalled to Life."

Not your fault that you had to go bi-monthly. Sales make or break you, as you well know.

Regarding your inquiry about completed stories or serials.

I always prefer serials. Much more can be obtained in plot and background, than trying to squeeze any full length novel into one issue.

Short stories or novelettes fully snappy are welcomed. They have to be in order to round out an issue.

Hope this answers your inquiry.—W. C. Brandt, Apt. N, 1725 Seminary Ave., Oakland 21, California.

∞

I finished Richard Wilson's serial with a feeling of satisfaction. I've been expecting something like this from him, ever since I read his "Murder on Mars," in an early issue of *Astonishing*. More of the same. The rest of the magazine was up to par.

As for authors, try and get Harry Bates. I don't understand why editors don't drag more stories out of him. Al-

fred Bester. A serial, I think, would be best. His first two novels were magnificent. Dwight V. Swain would be suitable. I also want you to try and get Don Wilcox. "The Hollow Planet" by this author was terrific.

And there was another author who wrote a few good stories. One that I can remember offhand is "Stairway to the Stars," in a '51 *Future*. Maybe you remember him. Hmm?—Don Kent, 3800 Wellington, Chicago, Illinois.

(Old Larry T. Shaw. you mean? Well, I'll see what I can do about all of your requests, but some of them may be a wee bit difficult.—LTS)

∞

I'm sorry to see that the

boom was short-lived. Keep plugging; I'm sure that I'll see INFINITY monthly one of these days.

Ike Asimov is appearing in sf mags about as regularly as the sputniks orbit the Earth. If not as a writer, then as a fan in the letter columns.

I enjoyed Anderson's "High Ones" very much. Not quite up to par for Poul, but still very good. Maybe he has to write faster these days.

I'm rather shocked at the loss of two great talents such as Kuttner and Kornbluth. May their memories always live in the joy that they gave to others. My greatest heartfelt sympathy to their wives, who have suffered *the* loss.—Bill Beard, 4740 West Hampton, Milwaukee 18, Wisconsin.

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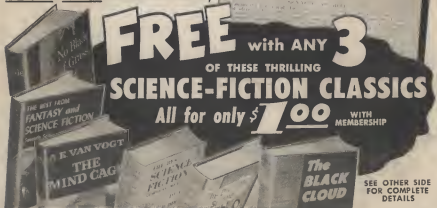
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